

The Epic

Oral and Written

Edited by

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John Miles Foley

Central Institute of Indian Languages
Mysore, India

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L. H.

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Introduction: Oral and Semiliterary Epics

LAURI HONKO

The comparative study of epics has until recently hosted a number of diverging definitions of the genre. Not very long ago there were literary historians, philologists and even folklorists who preferred to treat the epic primarily as a literary genre. What oral poetry could provide was poetic material at best, but the final result was always a literary product. Since genuine oral epics were thought not to possess the long format, the published long epics had to have undergone a process of literary compilation and editing. This view has been rapidly eroding during the past two decades due to extensive fieldwork on epic traditions in different parts of the world. It has brought to light numerous long oral epics in the living traditions of Central Asia, India, Africa and Oceania, for example. The existence of genuine long oral epics can no longer be denied. Still the problem of textualization remains: some editorial involvement is inevitably there in the production and publication process of oral epics, too. Oral epic traditions are performance traditions, and performance is a multidimensional communicative and emotive experience not to be captured in a simple verbal text. There is no doubt that the result of the publication of an epic text is more literary than the original oral performance and always a compromise.

Another source of confusion in defining epic is the view held by scholars who regard the name of the hero as a sufficient "epic" link between separate poems sung on different occasions. According to this view, the epic is not one item of tradition but the whole corpus of heroic narratives of a community or people. This position tends to mystify the genre by making the definition of what constitutes an epic entirely a matter of scholarly judgement. Nevertheless, this approach underlines the need to consider the general function of the totality of heroic poetry among any one people, and brings us to the social dimension of the epic. The epic universe of the singer may consist of a variety of poems and narratives, and the existence of a long epic often represents the end rather than the beginning of development.

In defining epic one cannot avoid the quality of greatness, even su-

periority. Epics usually rank very high among both literary and oral poetry genres. They are great narratives or superstories which excel in length, power of expression and significance of content over other narratives. The esteem in which they are held may, however, derive in part from their cultural context and function, for they are seen in relation to something beyond the text, such as the group's identity, its basic values, its criteria and models of heroic conduct and human endeavor, and the symbolic structures of its history and mythology. Hence narrative which is tedious and repetitive to the ear of an outsider may achieve greatness in the minds of the members of a particular group through their identification with the characters and events of the epic. Thus the reception of epic is also an essential element of its existence. Without social approval and even enthusiasm on the part of some group at least, a narrative cannot easily be categorized as epic.

Three categories of epics

By way of definition it seems useful to divide the multifaceted world of epics into three main categories: 1) literary, 2) semiliterary or tradition-oriented, and 3) purely oral epics. Literary epics are of less concern to us here. They are great narratives created by a writer or poet; an example would be John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Virgil's *Aeneid* also belongs to this category. The form and structure of literary epics are decided by the literate poet, and if there is some reference to preliterate sources and traditions, these elements do not direct the choice of plot or form. In short, these preliterate sources do not constitute a problem for the creator of a literary epic. He is the master of the elements available. For the compilers of tradition-based epics – such as Elias Lönnrot (1802–84), the compiler of the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic – the situation is different: they are sometimes led to include elements whose meaning they do not fully comprehend. In short, whereas folklore is just flexible material for the literary epic, it retains its mystery and poetic idea in the tradition-oriented epic, though admittedly to a varying degree from one compiler to another.

The *Kalevala* is a good example of a semiliterary or tradition-oriented epic. It preserved its enigmatic nature not only for new audiences from cultural environments outside Karelia, the province from which the majority of the oral poems constituting the basic material of the epic were collected, but also for Elias Lönnrot himself. Long after publishing several versions of the epic, he lectured on the *Kalevala* at Helsinki University and continued to ponder the problems of Finnish-Karelian poetry on the basis of the epic, which he obvi-

ously regarded as a primary folkloric source. To the modern observer his search for meaning in the Kalevala sounds perplexing: should Lönnrot not have known better than anyone else what the meaning of this episode or that verse was? It was he who in the first place chose them for inclusion in the epic.

What we have here is a situation typical in the processing of a tradition-oriented epic. Oral tradition is not always lucid even to the singers; its texture retains expressions hard to decipher, and in conceiving the plot, one faces problematic linkages. The singer can solve the problem by his artistic authority and decide what the audience must be offered. His lines will find meaning in the larger context, even if some individual expressions remain ambiguous. The compiler of a tradition-oriented epic must be much more explorative than the singer, because he does not command the material with the same authority. He needs good leads. In his quest for the epic, Elias Lönnrot had been encouraged by the discovery of what we may now call the *mental texts* of talented singers, sometimes materialized in cycles consisting of several poems which were mostly sung separately, and sometimes only in the form of discussion on the relations and chronology of events to be found in the oral poems. In the Old Kalevala of 1835 he still followed the ideas of leading singers. This was possible, because they were not very many.

Later, as more and more oral poems from different tradition areas were amassed on his desk, Lönnrot began to feel that the multitude of alternative epic frameworks maintained by oral singers in a way entitled him, as one who had a wider knowledge of all the available poetic materials than any living oral singer, to develop a mental text of his own which he utilized in the editing of the plot of the (New) Kalevala of 1849. Yet he never took the final step toward becoming a literary epic poet. Instead, he always maintained his preference for the texture available in the original folk poems. He was a collector, copier and compiler, not a literary poet in the strict sense of the word. Still the Kalevala as a whole is his creation, a reflection of the mental text which he developed during the process which lasted from 1828 to 1862 and brought about five versions of the epic. From the comparative point of view, the Kalevala qualifies as a semiliterary epic whose history of formation and source materials are known in greater detail than perhaps those of any other folk-poetry epic.

One good example does not, however, dispel the complexity of tradition-oriented epics. The degree to which tradition may play a part in the formation of a semiliterary epic varies enormously. To take an example close to the previous one, the position of the Estonian Kalevipoeg (1861) as a national epic is as indisputable as the Kalevala's, but its roots in oral tradition are scantier and more heterogeneous, consisting of both epic poems and prose narratives,

very often rather short passages of oral tradition. The compiler, Friedrich R. Kreutzwald (1803–82), faced a difficult task in devising a plot which could bridge all the gaps in the material. The fact that at one stage he considered casting his epic in prose shows that his contribution to the final form was much more substantial than in the case of Lönnrot. Paradoxically, the best argument for the inclusion of the Kalevipoeg in the group of tradition-based epics is constituted by the weaknesses of the epic, its lack of a cohesive plot and the number of minor incidents. A literary epic would not have such defects.

Each semiliterary epic has its own history of origin and often shows a rather unique utilization of the available oral materials. That tradition-based epics are as different as they are despite being modelled upon earlier great specimens of the genre is another proof of the strong imprint of traditions underneath these epics. There is plenty of room for case histories of semiliterary epics; the analytic register is still very incomplete.

Historically, it seems that epics produce epics. Although there are no objective criteria for the choice of a model epic, once the choice has been made, it leaves its imprint on the development of epic literature. Homeric epics are just one, fairly rare case of the formation of epics, but once the *Iliad* had established itself as the paradigm of a great epic, the entire European cultural and literary concept of epics was organized according to it. The example of Homer was important for Elias Lönnrot, too. He believed that his method of concatenating long epic sequences from separate poems was similar to the compilation technique of the editors of Homeric epics.

We can hardly overestimate the dominance of Homer in everything we think and say about epics. Yet the world is full of epics, hundreds, maybe thousands of great epics, living in oral or literary forms, epics which could very well compete for the place of the model epic, had not European cultural history taken Homer as the point of departure *par excellence*. In the present-day world Europe is not the most interesting place for comparative research on epics. Its epic traditions in many regions lost their orality centuries ago, and their literary history may not provide many innovative discoveries. Yet the Homeric paradigm continues to reign also outside Europe and North America, among Asian and African scholars, for example. One of the tasks we face today in comparative research is the abolition of cultural asymmetries in this respect, a task made possible by the rich findings of oral epics outside Europe.

There is no need here to go into detail in the study of purely oral epics. The word "pure" in this context is already an opener for a long chain of questions, even disputes. The present volume focuses on the interaction between oral and tradition-based epics, a broad field indeed if the textualization of oral epics for publication is to be in-

cluded. One volume is not going to solve many problems, but it is certainly one way of screening the issues and showing the scholars' views on what should be in the focus of our joint enterprise. New insights into the real, I should say polyphonic, nature of oral epics in living performance should not discourage textual work. The ways of analysis need not be those of performance.

The present-day situation is much better for the simple reason that we are able to return to the singer of epics. Modern folklore theory and modern documentation techniques are powerful aids in creating new bodies of material which will be able to answer questions not easily pursued in the older collections. The formation of so-called "thick" materials with multiple documentation of the same singer in a variety of performance contexts will open up paths to studies on the variation of form and content at a level of accuracy not dreamed of hitherto. Good fieldwork experiences also contain a promise of a useful impact on manuscript-based studies of epics not available for empirical research. The results gained in the study of oral composition techniques, for example, are often transferrable to other research contexts. An imaginative application of fresh findings and the cycling of information among active scholars are the best guarantee against stagnation.

Folklore Fellows in Oral Epics

During recent years a network of scholars interested in oral epics and their implications for more general, comparative studies on great epics has been established under the rubric of "Folklore Fellows in Oral Epics". Its purpose is to offer a forum for dialogue between scholars from Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas and Oceania. This network of about 70 active scholars from five continents and 22 countries organized four meetings during 1993-96. The first in Turku, Finland, in June 1993 carried the title "Epics Along the Silk Roads: Problems of Mental Text, Performance, and Written Codification"; its proceedings appeared in the journal *Oral Tradition* 11/1 (1996). The second, smaller seminar in Turku in June 1994 dealt with "Modes of Performing Epics". The third meeting in Mysore in January 1995 took the form of six panel sessions upon the suggestion of Dr. Jawaharlal Handoo, President of the 11th Congress of the International Society for Folk-Narrative Research, under the title "Oral and Semiliterary Epics". The last meeting was held again in Turku in June 1996 on the topic of "Textualization of Oral Epics" with a global survey by selected experts on the status of fieldwork-related research on oral epics in different parts of the world and in the classic text traditions of Europe and India.

The present volume consists of a selection of papers presented in Mysore and, in a few cases, revised afterwards by the authors. One paper was presented in another context at the congress. The panel was well attended, the papers were informative and the ensuing discussions lively. The panel seemed to provide both a thematic coherence and a kaleidoscopic view on actual research. The panel also selected its core audience, which stayed together on three afternoons and was able to weave an expanding web of discussion. The inclusion of a summary of the discussions in this volume is not, unfortunately, possible. Instead, in what follows I intend to highlight the variety of problems screened by the participants in their papers.

The enigma of variable length in oral epics: multiforms

The phenomenon that the same oral epic may appear in drastically different length in separate performances by the same singer is one of the professional secrets of oral epic composition. The key to this technique lies not in formulas but in multiforms, according to Lauri and Anneli Honko, who in their article develop the idea of multiforms on the basis of their fieldwork in southwestern Karnataka, India, among the speakers of Tulu, a Dravidian language. Multiforms are "repeatable and artistic expressions of variable length which are constitutive for narration and function as generic markers". They account for the fact that the epic singer can adjust the length of his epic performance within a very wide range of lines, yet without compromising the plot. A particular description which may take well over 100 lines in its elaborated form may be condensed into 2-5 lines in another performance. From the point of view of plot-sequence, both realizations are equally functional.

Multiforms are perhaps the most important tool in the singer's craft: they build on the well-known fact that basic situations recur and that a particular narrative feature or event is best expressed through poetic convention. The repeatability of situations and the conformity of expressions do not, however, exclude variability. On the contrary, manifestations of a multiform are rarely, if ever, completely identical. The important thing here is to refrain from the more fixed formulas which also exist in the epic and adopt a more flexible approach to descriptions and episodes through clearly cognate yet variable multiforms appearing in them.

Their functional equality notwithstanding, the long and short, elaborated and plain manifestations of a multiform may carry totally different poetic weight and meaning. Regardless of similarities of texture, they must be viewed as basically polysemantic and co-textually dependent. The variability to be studied through multiforms

thus has two dimensions, textural and semantic, both partly governed by co-textual dependencies which extend beyond one multiform.

Another feature of multiforms is their mobility: they may be transferred from one epic to another, or from one textual position to another within one and the same epic. In locating the occurrences of a multiform, the connection with texture, i.e. the linguistic level, must be maintained. Multiforms must be recognized by some keywords which tend to appear in all variants and which probably have a strategic role in the recall and production of a particular multiform in the epic discourse. In other words, multiforms should be recognizable from the singer's point of view, in theory at least. They are not just another way of doing structural analysis, and their coverage of the epic text remains far from complete. Even if the key to epic art may be found in the different handling of multiforms, there are passages in epics which are without multiforms and yet lucid and narratively elaborated.

The singer of the Siri epic, Mr. Gopala Naika, uses a variety of "emic" terms in characterizing the units of composition: the term *sandi* refers to sung epic (or sub-epic) and *kate* to the storyline; in the area of middle-size units, denoted as description or episode in the analytic or "etic" vocabulary, the term *gaṇṭu* is most common but co-exists with a great many synonyms, and *aksara* (< Skt. *akshara* 'word', 'letter') refers to the smallest units of composition such as formulas, phrases and "steps", or even individual words. The idea of applying the concept of multiform in this particular setting is to let it mediate between text and texture and between the emic and etic categories. Multiforms are units to be recognized by the singer, if not in his verbal metafolkloric commentary then at least in his poetic practice observable in a variety of performances of the "same" theme or episode. The Siri epic alone provides a textual mass sizeable enough (15,683 lines) for comparative study. The task is to elucidate Mr. Gopala Naika's system of multiforms, first in one of his epics, later in others. It is his poetics which primarily interests the authors, although extending this investigation to other singers and to the regional register of the epic vernacular is also possible.

Restoring the voice of mute epic texts

Much of the comparative research on epics is, especially in Europe, confined to texts without any contextual information concerning their performance and relation to larger bodies of oral tradition. Is it possible to reach the experience of epic performance through such mute texts? John Miles Foley answers the question in the affirmative in his article "The Rhetorical Persistence of Traditional Forms in Oral Epic

Texts". The key problem is textualization, and Foley formulates it in a special way: what happens when performances become libretti? The formulation already suggests that epic texts are based on and oriented toward a total live performance of which the written document is just a compromise. According to him, we should not only pose the question: what is lost when an oral performance is encoded in a written text? Rather, we should intensively listen to the text and read it looking for signals which are likely to reveal for what kind of an audience or reception the epic was encoded in the first place. The same is true with the longer perspective of textual history: the intermediate written forms have contributed to the survival of rhetorical forms belonging to oral or traditional environments.

The distinction between "pure oral" and "pure literary" is artificial as far as tradition-based epics are concerned, because both discourses coexisted in most cultures, interacting in the tradition process and serving different functions. Obviously, the "enabling event" or the full contextualization of the performed "text" through instant experience and relevant oral traditions was encoded in numerous ways in what we now experience as mute texts, available to wide audiences through the centuries. The task of scholars could be the restoration of the enabling event, at least partly, by reading the text as a way of speaking poetry.

Foley refers to methods such as Dennis Tedlock's "ethnopaaleography" based on the comparison of old texts with fresh audio-recordings and also a keen notation of non-linguistic elements of performance and Dell Hymes' ethnopoetical editing of texts noted down in longhand long before the age of the tape recorder. The aim of these methods is to restore the voice/sound of oral performance and make the oral poetics at work visible. Foley concurs with Hymes in that old texts without full contextual documentation indeed retain oral forms which should be recognized and used as guidelines in the reading of the texts. He uses the term "word-power" to signify the element which is not lost when oral goes into written and invites us to meet the "word-smith" behind the allegedly silent text.

Lack of contextual information can and should be compensated by experience of similar performance situations in other traditions, ages and areas. A comparative knowledge of oral case studies and empirical materials may prove to be useful. For Homer and Beowulf, for example, the model of dictation is not realistic nor the only possibility. A long chain of written manuscripts also presumes a written composition of parts of the epic. Yet the word-power persists in the transmission of tradition, oral and written alike. Instead of looking for the "original composition" of epics, the interest should focus on "what can be inferred about the reception of the works from the persistence of traditional forms as a textual rhetoric". The documents which

have reached us should be given a chance to "tell us about how they should be read"

The oral/literary transition

The problem of transition from orality to literacy has more strategic importance for the comparative research on epics than for many other oral genres because the composition of long epic forms may be dependent on writing, desk compilation and editing even in the case of originally oral source materials. The relation between oral and written in our documentary sources on epics is problematic because we tend to perceive this relation as a "mixture" of both without being able to postulate a "pure oral" and a "pure written" discourse as the starting points. We may wish to speak of a mixture of oral and written discourses, both identifiable in a given text. Or we may speak of a mixture of performative styles, i.e. an oral style in a written text or a written style in an oral performance. In a diachronic perspective we may observe continuous interaction between not only the contents but also the textures of oral and written sources. In more than one respect our published epics may be viewed as transitional texts, oral in origin, i.e. based on oral tradition in oral performance, but written and edited, and above all, fixed in their final form. Yet the term "transitional" only admits the presence of two kinds of communication. It does not solve the problem of dominant tradition: was it oral or written?

Minna Skafte Jensen introduces the problem in her article "A. B. Lord's Concept of Transitional Texts in Relation to the Homeric Epics". The concept of a pure, clearcut difference between oral and written composition was Albert Lord's starting point, but he compromised it later, somewhat unnecessarily, says Skafte Jensen. What was at stake was no less than the question of whether the oral comparison was relevant for the study of Homeric epics. The main argument of those who defend a written origin for these epics is their excellent composition, in other words, oral singers are not trusted to be capable of such eloquence and balanced emplotment in their transient performances. According to Minna Skafte Jensen, Homeric epics were successfully composed just because of their oral rendition, not in spite of it. The documentation method was dictation and took a relatively short time, perhaps a couple of months. Without the support and stringency of oral tradition and its rules of performance, adapted to written discourse, the work would have changed into something more individualistic and might not have been completed for many years. As an interesting point of comparison she takes the two heralds of literary culture and first producers of massive bodies of text compa-

rable to Homeric epics, the historians Herodotus and Thucydides, whose individualistic style is as totally different from the succinct epic style as is their exposition of "historic truth" from that of "epic truth". Had Homer been Herodotus or Thucydides, he would have written his work all his life and never finished it. The format and style of oral epic genre imposed special restraints on the dictation to one or more scribes.

Minna Skafte Jensen maintains that Homeric scholars have not yet recognized the depth of possibilities in oral composition, partly because they feel it must be inferior to written composition. She calls for better examples, model studies on good oral materials, which would fertilize the thinking in Homeric studies.

The paradox of the oral-formulaic theory was that it took inspiration from fieldwork and oral performance but remained basically a narrowly textual approach. It was handed over to philologists and historians of literature who were not fieldworkers and never intended to continue that line. If only five percent of the intellectual power devoted to pure speculation around fragmentary text corpuses had been directed to empirical studies on oral composition and the textualization of oral epics, we would certainly have more models than the South Slavic. A wider register of case studies in orality and textualization, unwritten and written, would provide new combinations of factors which are at play when different oral traditions, different modes of performance, different levels and types of audiences join forces in the making of an epic.

A taxonomy of epics

In her essay "Indian and Euro-Afro-Asian Epic Traditions" Heda Jäson offers a taxonomy of epics, oral and written, a synthesis which permits the inclusion of every epic. She defines the genre with the help of a confrontation of human and/or fabulous (divine, demonic) protagonists, and singles out four sub-categories of the epic: 1) Historical: a struggle between humans connected with real events; 2) National: a national/tribal struggle in superhuman proportions, with no linkage to real events; 3) Universal: a struggle of man and divinities friendly to man against demonic monsters, with the champion defending humanity in toto; 4) Mythic: struggles between deities, between good and evil on a very general level.

Jason makes a distinction between the "overt" and "covert" layers in the epic, the latter being the special knowledge of the performer, not known to the audience in certain societies and performance traditions. She also claims that in the overt layer the confrontation is always between humans, whereas in the covert layer the struggle is be

tween fabulous beings, deities and demons. Interestingly, Jason argues that the ethical element of epics becomes visible only when both overt and covert layers are explicitly voiced to the audience.

As to the relation between oral and written epic forms, Jason makes the point that the content units of oral and semiliterary epics are not radically different because multiple rewriting and fresh orality provide the same content types.

Jason distinguishes between "episodic" and "biographical" as the two main types of epic. Based on detached units, the episodic epic has a closed plot, whereas the biographical epic shows a chain of generations and an open plot. Detached-unit epics do not connect with other plots or heroes but tell just one story with its complication and solution, whereas the biographical form may be expanded by adding and integrating elements "before" and "after" the main protagonist's life story. Between these main types there are, however, transitional forms, such as the "quasi-biographical" (incomplete biographies of divine and human beings) and the "culminating-battle chain" (biographical elements converge on a grand battle after which the biographical interest is lost).

In this wide perspective, Indian epic traditions contain all the main types. They do not constitute a group, not one but many traditions.

The quest for formulas

Formulaic elements have been generally attributed to oral discourse. The more formulas a text has, the more likely its oral origin. Many texts which have lost their oral backgrounds have been analyzed by using the frequency of oral formulas as an index of orality. Even percentages have been calculated to define the degree of orality.

John Brockington's article "Formulaic Expression in the Rāmāyaṇa: Evidence for Oral Composition?" poses a question mark over this practice. He finds large numbers of formulaic expressions in Maḥābhārata (M) and Rāmāyaṇa (R), the commonest being "a personal name plus a standard epithet", thus a classic Parryan case of formula. Other types include: introductions and conclusions to speeches, formulas expressing emotion or emphasis, certain descriptive and hyperbolic phrases, stock expressions for battle scenes, phrases of time, place and number, proverbs and similes.

Brockington classifies formulas according to three text categories: 1) those found both in M and R, 2) those found in M but not in R (except in its later parts), 3) those found in R but not in M (except in late passages). The largest group is the first, i.e. the common formulas. The astonishing finding is that the frequency of stock formulas is highest

in the later parts of both M and R. This raises the question whether formulas can be regarded as an index of orality. Rather it seems that their use was increasing at the time of decay of the genuine oral tradition, perhaps as a means to create an impression of authenticity.

The conclusion comes close to the resolutions of John Foley's article. The traditional phraseology does not disappear immediately when writing is employed and the diction of a written work continues to show formulaic patterns.

Intergeneric interaction

The article by Mary Brockington "The Relationship of the Rāmāyaṇa to the Indic Form of 'The Two Brothers' and to the Stepmother Redaction" shows by analyzing one folktale how epic traditions and folktales have been in contact and have interacted. The interaction has resulted in elements being borrowed in both directions, from the "Two Brothers" to Rāmāyaṇa and vice versa. Interaction has continued over a long period of time. An example of a later date is the penetration of the tale into later vernacular literary or folk versions of the otherwise dominant Rāmāyaṇa ("Show-me-how" motif, attempted deception of the sage with a substitute pair of brothers).

The Stepmother redaction of the tale shows the impact of Rāmāyaṇa. The hero defends his half-brother and turns against his mother, who favours him strongly. This is as odd as if Cinderella and the Ugly Sisters were friends, not rivals. The model here is Bharata's affection for Rāma. The epic has been able to reverse the folktale logic.

The essay provides interesting examples of the distribution and adaptation of folktales. In India, the pauper son had to be elevated and made a prince in order to make him able to marry a princess. This cultural adaptation of the tale brought about problems which had to be accommodated by further new developments of the plot.

The lesson gained from the interaction between Rāmāyaṇa and a folktale is that the content elements of both traditions have been in the same pool of narratives in some storytellers' repertoire. In composing a narrative, both sources could be utilized. This is shown by the borrowing of not only central motifs but also rather trivial and inconsequential features.

Brinkmanship between oral and written

Susan S. Wadley derives the findings of her article "Creating a Modern Epic: Oral and Written Versions of the Hindi Epic *Ḍholā*"

from long-term fieldwork in northern India. It provided her with a rare opportunity to study empirically the much debated question: How close to each other can oral and written performances of an epic be? One easily visualizes a predominance of one of the two, preferably the oral, if that is the criterion of originality. This predominance makes the other discourse subservient or even imitative of the supposedly primary discourse.

Not so, says Susan Wadley. Her materials on the North Indian *Ḍholā* epic provide a multifaceted history of strongly diverging versions of both oral and written origin. There are different troupes with their oral and musical performance traditions, and there are literate writer-singers capable of modifying their version separately for written and oral performance.

A case in point is Matol, who died in 1991 at the age of 62. He composed in writing an entirely individual interpretation of the three subepics which constitute *Ḍholā*, proceeding from the best known episodes to less familiar ones. There he drew on local poetic styles but also created much on his own, including metre and plot. On the oral side, he led a troupe of four, himself playing a harmonium. The contrast between written and oral is stark indeed: the written versions are philosophical, adhere to metre and rhyme containing well-hidden verbal games by the author, whereas the oral versions are dominated by humour instead of philosophy, musical elements instead of metre or rhyme, and the hidden verbal games replaced by overt jesting.

India's long epic traditions of both the written and oral performance of narratives may thus be studied from the point of view of multicontextual differences and almost totally separate discourses incarnated in one singer/author.

The fluidity and longevity of a historical epic

Doris Edel depicts in her article "Mental Text, Landscape, Politics, and Written Codification: The Irish Epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge*" in unique tables the semiliterary life of the "Cattle-Raid of Cooley", also called the "Irish Iliad", a 4–5,000 line epic available in numerous manuscripts dating from the 11th to the 19th century. Basically a war history between the North and South of Ireland, it shows a remarkable fluidity in its forms through the centuries, obviously composed of rather independent episodes, which could be told separately from the epic. Yet an oral mental frame of a larger format must have existed, claims Edel, even before the first written documentation and certainly after it. The epic extended its scope during its life, integrating new incidents and narrative elements into the mental texts in

the minds of its users, but it also tolerated rearrangement and episodic performance.

The author concentrates on two problems: the longevity of the epic and the means of integrating its loose elements. The longevity of the epic is explained by its political function. The Cattle-raid or *crech* was not only an epic theme but was used as a political weapon up to the 16th century, actually as a predominant form of warfare until the consolidation of English power around 1600. Another underlying factor engendering continued interest was the historical antagonism between Ulster and the rest of Ireland. The main factors holding together the loosely-knit epic were the landscape in which the epic's action was situated and the toponymy, i.e. milieu-morphological factors and place-names.

The singer of epics as a historian

Praising the name and deeds of the king and his forefathers has been one of the tasks of the epic singer from times immemorial and is one of the phenomena capable of explaining the existence of the genre. This political function also explains the proximity of the epic to such rhetorical genres as praise songs and laments, which one occasionally finds immersed in epic discourse. The close linkage to local history and political prestige has made the epic *the* narrative among narratives, namely, the one yielding the official version of the tale of how our universe and our religious, social and cultural identity came to be. Keeping alive the legitimating power of unwritten history, the epic singer became the memory and archive of the community.

In Yorubaland, as Isaac Olawale Albert shows in his essay "'Alaro Ataoja Osogbo': a Yoruba Palace Historian", the singer of epics attained a high social status and enjoyed a regular salary for knowing the *oriki* or praise-names and performing them correctly in their proper context at the will of the king. Learning the hereditary profession began early, in childhood, when the young boy followed his father, the singer, from one performance to another. It was not only the life of the present king but also the praise-names and deeds of his fifteen predecessors as well as the nomenclature and functions of a vast array of divinities which had to be offered in poetic recitation during annual festivals and various political and religious ceremonies. The importance of the Yoruba palace historian compares well with, and perhaps even surpasses, the role of royal griots in Mali and elsewhere in West Africa. Without him, the authority of the regent could be misconstrued and his beneficence forgotten.

Integrating poetic links between lyric and epic

Lauri Harvilahti examines in his paper "The Poetic 'I' as an Allegory of Life" the regional aspect of intergeneric relations between epic and lyric poetry. In Finland, Karelia and Ingria the female song genres often display the singing "I" as the main protagonist. This is common not only in lyric songs and laments but also in wedding songs and even in epic poetry. Harvilahti shows that especially in the southernmost tradition area Ingria (around St. Petersburg) the poetic "I" has penetrated several poem categories, even mythical poems about the origin of the world. If genre boundaries prove to be fluid, it is just another ethno poetic lesson of the real links between poetic forms fully capable of adapting themselves to a variety of contexts. This expansion, which in a way creates networks of "unrelated" poems, raises the question: Does this "I" relate to real-life situations of the singers, and if yes, in what way? In other words, the "same" genre may turn out to be rather different in dissimilar, mostly regional poetic cultures.

Seeking factors which may have promoted a development of this kind, Harvilahti observes that the female dominance in singing occasions – in the south the epic and mythical poetry is in the hands of female performers whereas in the northern tradition areas the performers of these genres are men – has caused singing in the first person singular to proliferate. Harvilahti also studies the reliability of sources and finds them scanty on contextual information and the social meaning of songs. What is worse, the lack of melody and the absence of real sung forms with numerous repetitions, refrains and filler words easily eliminated by editors of folklore texts may often lead to grave mistakes concerning prosody, texture in general and even the interpretation of meaning.

Bards as collectors

Kirsten Thisted presents an interesting example of oral/literary relations in her treatise "The Collection of Greenlandic Traditions: Oral and Semiliterary". Western Greenland provides a rare case of oral traditions being massively codified into writing by storytellers themselves, in this case literate Greenlanders who had been asked to put down their memories by Danish collectors of folklore and oral history. Thisted studies this transition from orality to literacy through several personalities, one of whom, Knud Rasmussen, the famous reteller of Greenlandish narratives and beliefs, is widely known. She does, however, rate Rasmussen much lower as an authentic informant than certain other scribes. Rasmussen also bought ma-

terial, i.e. stories written down by Greenlanders, without mentioning it in his books.

An interesting detail is the "editing out" of certain features in the narratives harvested during the second wave of collection in the 1860s. These included disclaimers of pagan beliefs, Christian interpretations and references to modern tools and concepts. Thus the chronologically later narratives appeared to be much more archaic than the earlier ones. Greenland is thus one of the few places where people could very early (in the mid-19th century) go public, having their oral tradition printed in small booklets intended to create and enhance a feeling of cultural identity. Yet, the generations of seal hunters who could write and who were followed by others whose texts were not necessarily reports from their own life milieu; there was an early emergence of a literary elite which began to move toward fully-fledged literary creation, i.e. literature proper. It took about 90 years, however, before the first novel was published in 1914.

The epic in the modern age

The epic traditions show remarkable persistence in times of change. As a matter of fact, their importance grows when the society is in turmoil. This is due to their close relationship with cultural identity. When crisis and change breed uncertainty, the people adhere to values and models which have passed many tests of time. One source for such values and exemplars is the epic.

Jiacuo Jiangbian illustrates this adherence to a great epic by a nation undergoing modernization by analyzing the role of the Gesar epic in the contemporary Tibetan society. He finds four kinds of needs which the epic is able to satisfy, namely, psychological (the epic provides models of good life and heroic achievement of the Tibetan people), behavioural (the epic is part and parcel of festivities, sacrificial rites and worship, as well as everyday activities such as trade and family life), educational (the epic serves as a source of the history of the Tibetans) and social (the epic corroborates ethical principles and social cohesion). The epic of Gesar has been able to immerse itself in the stream of modernization by transforming itself into alternative forms of performance relevant to contemporary rural and urban life. Theatrical troupes have adapted it to their programmes of dance and song dramas; opera, radio and TV are typical modern scenes of performance for Gesar, too. Sculpture, silk painting, embroidery and fresco repeatedly draw inspiration from the epic. Even in remote areas one may meet institutions like "Gesar Culture Centre", and the old hand-written and woodcut manuscripts of the epic are consecrated in the shrine as a family treasure. A staggering

number of copies of the episodes of Gesar have been printed in the past decade. And the most basic integer of tradition, the oral singing of Gesar, flourishes in the performances of well over one hundred singers, many of which command extensive sequences of the hero's life and adventures.

The importance of documenting the singers

Jia Zhi, in his article "Minstrels: A Golden Key to Epic Study", divides Chinese epics into two main types: epic of origin and heroic epic. The former relate the origin of the universe and human beings, immigration and the creation of culture, battles against other tribes and demons or monsters. The heroic epic emerged during the disintegration of the primitive society. It reflects tribal alliances and conflicts and a struggle for existence. To this type belong the three greatest epics: the Tibetan Gesar, the Mongolian Jangar and the Kirghiz Manas.

Most of the 57 minority nationalities of China do not possess writing of their own. Thus their epics are dependent upon oral circulation. There are, however, examples of notebook traditions supporting oral performance as well as written copies of epic texts. A good example is Gesar, which was handed down in the form of handwritten copies. Many a folk artist based his performance on such a copy. Yet the traditions of about 140 living singers of Gesar must be considered richer in content than the handwritten copies and woodcut texts preserved in temples. The written copies and manuscripts are important mainly because they have a long history illustrating the evolution of epics and the relations between epics and religion.

Vividly Jia Zhi describes the discoveries to be made listening to and interviewing the singers. The epic traditions may be declining but there is still time to find good singers willing to cooperate in the documentation of the oral heritage they own. The volume of this heritage is revealed in the in stunning numbers of lines. Obviously, many a singer has added chapters to the life story of an epic hero. Putting all of them into a single storyline may not be a realistic goal for the individual singer, for all episodes are not equally important or enchanting to the audience. Yet they constitute a marvellous base for epic registers, to be harvested in oral and literary performances.

Jia Zhi concludes with an interesting sketch of the taxonomy of oral and semiliterary singers. The main dividing line goes between "god granting" and "self studying" minstrels, i.e. those who "learn in dream" and are able to receive spiritual messages from past masters or gods, and those who "learn by hearing" other singers or by reading the epic text in a notebook or manuscript. The passive hearing of a

text may take place only once or twice and it is followed by a period of individual preparation for the first performance. This implies adaptation of the narrative to the singer's world and mode of performance. In some cases the singers may even identify themselves with a hero figure. There is no doubt that the epic heroes constitute powerful life models for singers and audiences alike.

The phenomenology of oral and written

The problem of semiliterary epics touches upon but is not identical with our present research interests concerning borderline phenomena between orality and literacy. The idea of a predominantly one-way traffic from oral to written has been replaced by more complex models concerning, for example, oral styles in written text and the "written-like" handling of materials in oral performance; the visible or invisible use of notebooks and manuscripts in the oral performances of epics; various forms of "copying" oral text; the transfer of ownership of oral texts, the mental editing of textual elements, oral and written, between performances, the intertextual formation of mental texts in the mind of the singer, etc. This discussion has generally made the border between orality and literacy more fluid than before.

As far as oral epics are concerned, their relations to literary epics have been observed for a long time, especially in cultures which possess oral and literary epic traditions as strong, parallel streams. The best example is probably India, where interaction between oral, semiliterary and literary epics has been observable for centuries. The vivacity of India's epic traditions makes it futile to draw strict lines of demarcation between "high-level" Sanskrit and "low-level" folk epics in spite of their clear differences. In India, written and oral cultures are generally merging. The transmission of traditional literature has occurred through a variety of modes of communication, both oral and written.

A systematic phenomenology of the oral and written performances of epics, especially from the point of view of their interaction, is still to be written. At one end of the scale we may speak of a tradition-based semiliterary epic referring to cases where the oral materials have been compiled into a literary, cohesive text which is there not for singing but for reading. The Finnish Kalevala is an example of such a process of editing. Since both its oral materials and the written epic are in verse, the Kalevala may also be called a folk-poetry epic.

At the other end of the taxonomy we find the previous case reversed: the written text forms the backbone of an oral epic performance. South Indian folk versions of the Rāmāyaṇa may consist of

practically unaltered verse attributed to the court poet Kampan and recited orally with lengthy philosophical commentaries of an improvised nature. In recent times, the literary Mahābhārata has begun to dominate, mainly through film and TV, folk performances of the epic, replacing local oral versions. In Rajasthan, the surviving folk versions of the Mahābhārata "deviated" from the literary text quite considerably in their narrative tone and motifs; now they are in retreat, partly because of their weak or nonexistent connections to ritual functions but also because of the availability of more authoritative literary versions of the Mahābhārata stories.

It seems realistic to assume that the discussion on oral/written interaction is only just beginning. The modern computerized society will grab the hitherto relatively well-protected elements of oral poeties for its own editing purposes in mostly uncontrollable and uncopyrighted ways. The day may not be far away when I, the scholar, will cooperate with school teachers in creating a computer file of epic multiforms in the Finnish-Karelian poetic vernacular, setting the following task for the student: compile your own epic!

Oral Composition of Epics

Multiforms in Epic Composition

LAURI HONKO & ANNELI HONKO

Two classic descriptions of epic composition

The primary locus of oral epic composition is the mind of the singer. It may be conceptualized as a store, as a kind of archive in which all "elements of production" reside. The term "elements of production" comes from G. Thomson (1954: 530), who translates Wilhelm Radloff (1885: xvii) as follows:

Every minstrel with any skill at all always improvises, so that he cannot recite a song twice over in exactly the same form... Thanks to long practice, he has a whole series of "elements of production", if I may so express it, which he puts together in suitable form according to the course of the narrative. These consist of pictures of certain events and situations, such as the birth of a hero, his upbringing, the glories of weapons, preparations for fighting, the storm of battle, the conversation of a hero before battle, portraits of people and horses, praise of the beauty of a bride. – His art consists in piecing together these static components as circumstances require and connecting them with lines invented for the occasion. These normative elements can be used in very different ways. He knows how to sketch a picture in a few strokes, or paint it more thoroughly, or elaborate all the details with epic fullness. The more of these elements he has at his disposal, the greater the diversity of his performance, and the greater his power to sing on without tiring his listeners with a sense of monotony. A skilled minstrel can recite any theme he wants, any story that is desired, *ex tempore*, provided only that the course of events is clear to him. (Quoted from Kailasapathy 1968: 135–36.)

This description of the singer's technique by Radloff is a classic example and highly useful to remember as the frustration with more modern theories arises. It may require a couple of remarks but can otherwise serve as a point of departure for a discussion on the oral composition of epics.

One remark concerns "improvisation": from Albert Lord (1960: 5) to Karl Reichl (1992: 219–21) scholars have warned against its misleading connotations of creativity, spontaneity and novelty. Lord replaced it with "composition-in-performance" but admitted later, in passing, that "true improvisation, as distinct from composition by formula and theme", is worth studying (Lord 1986: 470), whereas Reichl showed what real, artistic improvisation requires and suggested that the oral epic "is not actually composed in performance, it is rather *re-composed* in performance" (Reichl 1992: 222).

Another remark, perhaps too obvious, would be that an epic singer can recite "any theme he wants, any story that is desired" only within his repertoire, i.e., he needs a model performance which he must have observed. Yet straightforward imitation is not the key of the process at hand. New elements must be integrated in a special way in his system of epic tradition before they can become a part of his performance. For this internalization of new material he needs time, perhaps a day or a week. The time is not used for word-by-word memorizing of the text heard at the model performance but for rethinking the story and creating an outline of his own version which may be even longer than the original and which normally contains elements from his earlier stock of tradition. It is the adaptation and adjustment of the new story into his tradition system – an epic register at the individual level – which takes some intellectual work by the singer before he can feel ready for the first performance of his version. The time is ripe for that only after what we may describe as a period of "mental editing", implying an integration of new elements with the old, or even a translation of the new into the old.

Another classic field-observer of oral epic composition, Elias Lönnrot, writes in the preface of his final version of the Finnish national epic, the Kalevala (1849), on the basis of his experiences in Karelia:

As for the authenticity of the songs, the matter runs about as follows: At a feast or some other social gathering someone hears a new song and tries to remember it. Then on another occasion when this person himself is now singing it before a new audience, he remembers quite exactly the material proper rather than its narrative word for word in every detail. Those passages which he does not remember in just the original words he tells in his own, in places perhaps better even than they were before. And if some rather insignificant incident among them is left out, another can take its place out of the singer's own head. In the same way, then, second and third persons who hear it proceed to sing it and the song is changed, changed rather in individual words than in the material itself. (See Magoun 1963: 376.)

In Karelia, epic poems were short, a few hundred lines at most, but the technique of "remembering" as opposed to verbatim "memorizing" was utilized by the singers. As Lord points out in one of his last articles: "Lönnrot recognized two kinds of transmittal, one closer to the 'original'... and one more removed", basically the same dichotomy which had been observed in Yugoslavia and applied, hypothetically, to ancient Greek tradition:

It is extremely important to realize the distinction between *memorizing*, with its conscious attempt to reproduce every word of an 'original', which must be fixed for that process to be meaningful, and *remembering*, the basic, normal process of recall, which is more potent, I believe, than it is generally credited with being. It is through learning the art of verse-making and through remembering given, discrete, units of composition, rather than through word-for-word memorization that the South Slavic songs were both composed and transmitted. I believe that it was in this way that the epic songs in ancient Greek tradition were transmitted from one generation to another. (Lord 1987: 307.)

It is not necessary, however, to claim that the parts of discourse to be memorized "must be fixed"; word-for-word accuracy in reproduction may occur with or without intention, i.e. with or without a subjective idea of fixity. The possible remark here would be that the result of both methods of recall may prove to be identical, i.e. remembering may lead to verbatim reproduction of certain parts of stored discourse just as memorization may lead to unintended variation. The South Slavic material collected by Parry and Lord gives evidence of a stability which harbors verbatim reproduction. Admittedly, traditions can be different in this respect. It has been argued, for instance, that in Karelia the higher stability of epic poetry presumes more verbatim reproduction than in the South Slavic areas, where epic poetry is more fluid (Kiparsky 1976: 95).

The distinction made by Lord need not be nullified, however, even if we admit that both methods may be intertwined and utilized by one and the same singer. The extent to which one method is used at the expense of the other may depend on different factors: the singer (or mentality) type, the degree of professionalism (novice singers tend to memorize more than experienced singers), the subgenre in question, the function (ritual or non-ritual) of certain expressions, or, as in the case of Lönnrot's present example, different environments of learning (home or market-place, with many or no possibilities of rehearsing the same singer).

Multiforms as units of oral composition

The critical moment in creating a methodology for an analysis of oral epics is choosing the units of composition. Theory must be brought into harmony with empirical field material. We have confronted this fact in our fieldwork among the speakers of Tulu in South Karnataka. In December 1990, we audio- and videotaped a comprehensive version of the epic of Siri from Gopala Naika in Belthangadi Taluk. Our project team included two colleagues from Mangalore University, Professor B. A. Viveka Rai and Dr. K. Chinnappa Gowda. In 1986, the singer had dictated the same epic to a student staying in his home, Ms. Sudha, under the supervision of Dr. Gowda, who was teaching at a nearby college at the time. That dictated epic was taken down in longhand using Kannada script. The work required numerous sessions during several months and resulted in 8,538 lines. In our documentation of the epic in 1990 we asked Mr. Naika to sing the epic from the beginning to the end. As in the dictation process, he was now free to take as much time as he wished and to make pauses as he wanted. What was new was the mode of performance: he had never before performed the epic in its entirety by singing. The singing lasted seven days and yielded 15,683 lines. (Honko 1993: 195–200.)

The reduction of the text in dictation proved to be about 45.5%, i.e. considerably less than in Brenda Beck's documentation of the dictated and audience-oriented versions of the Tamil epic *Aṇṇamār*, where it was about 70% (Beck 1982: 59). After the singing of the Siri epic had been completed, we began, on several occasions, to interview Mr. Naika on his repertoire of epics, his learning of these traditions and his performance career as the leader of the Siri possession cult group consisting of about 80 women. We also posed rather complicated questions about epic composition. His answers were informative and professional. He was also both able and willing to comment on the differences between his dictated and sung renditions, whereas Beck's informant "was unable to describe even small differences between his two presentations" (Beck 1982: 59).

This is but one example of the range of variation in the performance of South Indian oral epics. It is also an example created in an induced context. We assume, however, that the techniques applied by the singers remain largely the same as they extend or abridge an epic in its more natural performance contexts. Thus we may use this example and ask: what happens when an epic is reduced to one third of its size? Brenda Beck has listed twelve major adjustments which occurred as the singer, instead of traditional performance for a village audience, dictated the *Aṇṇamār* epic which normally consists of poetry and prose:

1. The quantity of words was reduced by about 70%.
 2. The formulaic and poetic passages underwent greater shrinkage than did the prose narration.
 3. Much descriptive detail, particularly information on the general setting, was eliminated.
 4. Extraverbal information contained in pitch, in drum rhythms, in pauses, etc., was lost.
 5. A certain amount of meter was added to individual song lines in order to compensate for the loss of the drum rhythms that would normally have accompanied these passages.
 6. There was more variation in the meters used, and some added matching of these to individual themes.
 7. Responses from an assistant bard, and grunts, coughs, etc., from the audience, were eliminated.
 8. Much humor was eliminated.
 9. The use of short passages, summarizing actions described in song-poems, was cut dramatically.
 10. Nonsense syllable lines, which mainly serve to set up a new rhythm before introducing the next song, were eliminated.
 11. The order of presentation was changed; a general overview of the action was placed before mood-setting descriptions.
 12. The birth of two siblings was inverted, in order to make a male older than his sister. This reduced the potential humor in certain scenes in which they interact.
- (Beck 1982: 59–60.)

The list of observations may be continued because in spite of certain similarities, it will vary from one epic tradition to another. A detailed analysis of the sung and dictated versions of the Siri epic in a comparable manner is still to be made. Yet it is possible to single out one factor clearly most responsible for the textual difference between the two versions. It is the handling of what we call multiforms, *repeatable and artistic expressions of variable length which are constitutive for narration and function as generic markers*. Multiforms are perhaps the most important tool in the singer's craft: they build on the fact that basic situations recur and that a particular narrative feature or event is best expressed through poetic convention. The repeatability of situations and the conformity of expressions does not, however, exclude variability. On the contrary, manifestations of a multiform are rarely completely identical. It is variation and nuance which lend multiforms semantic exactitude and poetic importance.

We contend that an oral epic breathes through multiforms. The "breathing" metaphor refers, firstly, to the fact that an oral epic has no fixed length, i.e. its text may appear in shorter or longer form depending on such factors as the situational context, mode of perfor-

mance and performative style. Secondly, shorter or greater length is essentially produced by resorting to multiforms. Although easily perceived as fairly constant elements of epic discourse, multiforms are largely responsible for variability in the epic because their presence or lack, as well as their different manifestations offer the singer different strategic solutions. A multiform may be 2 or 120 lines long and yet fulfil its function of signification regardless of its length; in other words, it may appear as a short statement of fact or as an artistically elaborated characterization of an event, space, time or person. Yet the long and short, elaborated and plain manifestations of a multiform may carry totally different poetic weight and meaning with them. Another feature of multiforms is their mobility: they may be transferred from one epic to another, or from one textual position to another within one and the same epic. This co-textual variation makes multiforms polysemantic.

Descriptions, episodes and multiforms

Our definition of multiform is a working definition. For the time being, as our study has not yet been completed, we want to maximize its usefulness as an analytic tool for our material. We do not want to combine it with usages created elsewhere, which could, in turn, force themselves upon our epic text.

Tentatively, it seems wise to separate multiforms from pure content units, such as motifs and episodes, and maintain the connection with texture, i.e. the linguistic level. Therefore, we are not conducting just another linear analysis of narrative structure on the level of content. Multiforms must be recognized by some linguistic features, e.g. keywords which tend to appear in all variants and which probably have a strategic role in the recall and production of a particular multiform in epic discourse. In other words, multiforms should be recognizable from the singer's point of view, in theory at least. This does, however, bring us to discuss the levels of composition, automatic or unconscious recall or production of "text" as opposed to conscious "editing", which may, in turn, be of a short-term or long-term nature. For the moment, the important thing is to keep the concept of multiform operative in the singer's own tradition system and later also in the tradition systems of other singers within the same local genre. This is the tradition-ecological use of the concept. (On tradition-ecology, see Honko 1985; Honko et al. 1993: 51-57.)

Walter J. Ong argues that an oral epic cannot have a climactic linear plot. According to him, it only comes with writing.⁶ For an epic poet, "episodic structure was the only way and the totally natural way of imagining and handling lengthy narrative" (Ong 1982: 144).

Although his generalization about the nature of oral storylines may require some modification, it may not be out of place to engage the term "episode" to denote what it has customarily denoted, namely, "a logically separable unit of plot". The "logic" here is applied to the linear content of an epic and has no strings attached to its texture. An episode may or may not coincide with a multiform; it may also contain two or more multiforms. Yet the boundaries of both need not converge.

But whose logic is applied to demarcate episodes, the singer's or our own? The answer will be: both. The singer of an oral epic does not confront the problems of textual presentation in the same manner as the scholar who noted down his epic performance. The scholar may have to draw lines of demarcation which would be meaningless to the singer. Yet the episodes come from the singer, he utilizes similar content units or groups of ideas in his epic composition. Most episodes are like images of situations, simple acts or events, perhaps not marked in the same way as in a textual presentation but colorful and easy to recall. Wording these images or tableaux and stringing them into a generic discourse by using multiforms is a central part of the work of an epic singer. The difference between episodes and multiforms lies in their levels of operation: while episodes are units of content and of (linear) structure, multiforms are units of expression and texture. Another difference lies in the fact that a multiform exists only through its repeatability, whereas episodes may be unique. The entire epic text may be divided into episodes, whereas multiforms cover only parts of it.

It may be noted in passing that "dividing the entire epic text into episodes" presupposes a maximization of episodic coverage and may make the use of the term "episode" slightly strained, because time-markers, spatial settings, refrains and other non-narrative but fairly independent textual elements must be included in one episode or another. Therefore, a defensible solution would be to make the episodic coverage pertain to narrative text only, thus leaving room for a syntagmatic analysis of the whole text consisting of narrative or episodic discourse and non-narrative elements.

For comparative purposes it is necessary to employ terms which denote content units which can be found across language and tradition boundaries. They should be free of tradition-ecological limitations. Their value is orientational: we may want to know what the most typical content elements of a particular genre, in this case, the epic are. In early Indian poetics the expression *ashṭaadaśavarṇanas*, 'eighteen descriptions', was used to refer to such typical contents in epic literature as City, Sea, Mountain, Seasons, Moonrise, Sunrise, Wandering in a forest, Swimming, Drinking party, Sexual pleasure, Departing, Birth of a son, Strategic consultation, Mission of a mes-

senger, Successful travel and Success of a hero. K. Krishnamurthy ascribes the term "description" (*varṇana*) to Bhaamaha, whose teachings on epic poetics in *Kaavyaalankaara* (probably from the 6th century) he summarizes as follows:

An epic consists of many chapters (*sarga*). It is about great men. It is grand in magnitude. There should not be folksiness in its use of words. The epic should be ornamented by metaphors, similes, etc. *Consultation, messengers, travel, war, the success of the hero are the five major components of an epic.* [Emphasis added.] Though the epic preaches Dharma [religion/charity], Artha [economy], Kaama [love] and Mooksha [salvation], the stress of teachings is on meanings connected with worldly life. The epic depicts the nature of the universe. It is constituted of different emotions (*rasas*).

The focus of the epic is, first, on the magnificence of its theme, then on its proportions. In an epic, descriptions are more important than the story. The expression of emotions is more important than the scholarship. Topicality is more important than grandeur of words. Depiction of the nature of the world and orientation to the philosophy of life are essential. The style should be simple but should not come down to the level of village folk. (Krishnamurthy 1958: 20.)

This is no place to analyze the concept of epic in old Indian poetics, but one striking feature is the role of *rasas*, or emotions, in the constitution of an epic. They are mentioned in another source, Shri Vishnudharmooṭṭara Maahaapuraana, probably earlier than Bhaamaha. In it we are told that the emotions in question are nine in number and that they should be expressed well-integrated into the story (Shastri 1969: 3). The importance of *rasas* is also stressed by later authors such as Daṇḍin (in the 7th century) and Heemachandra (1088–1172). None of the authors does, however, give a specification of what emotions are intended. It almost seems as if the "epic breadth" in presentation is thought to be necessary for the formation of "emotions" more than of plot, an observation which is supported by contemporary field materials on oral epics. Parallelisms, embellishments, and extensions are needed to create an appropriate basis for emotions in the listeners. Such poetic means are used by the oral singer when he wants to emphasize the importance of some event or action. He cannot directly say: "this is important" or "she was very worried". Instead, he must use poetic means of narrative emphasis. If this is correct, then one basic difference between dictated and sung versions of epics could be that dictated versions are about plot and sung versions about (epic) emotions. This interpretation is supported by Heemachandra's dictum: "The work [epic] should not be short. If it

is short it obstructs the comprehension of emotions" (Shastri 1969: 34).

The Shri Vishnudharmottara Maahaapuraana already operates with descriptions but they do not yet seem to constitute a system. "Travel, sending a messenger, war, the success of a hero – these are the main features of an epic," it says and adds: "In such an epic, country, kings, seasons, fire, rivers and women should be described" (Shastri 1969: 3). The basic binary opposition between hero and anti-hero is mentioned several times in it as something which "should be described". Yet it does not seem to belong to the emergent concept of description (whereas Success of the hero clearly does). In other words, the term is event-oriented, referring to elements which are at the singer's disposal, in a way seeking entry to and placement in the epic. Once they obtain access, they provide two things: first, a possibility for widening the plot with a set string of episodes and, second, a quality of real epic narration, i.e. a generic atmosphere. Relations between the hero and anti-hero are continuous, not oriented toward one event or a string of episodes. Therefore, they do not qualify as "descriptions". Later authors seem to develop the concept of anti-hero or "enemy" mainly as a device for emphasizing the magnificence of the hero. Daṇḍin, for example, says: "First describing the clan, valour, education, etc., of the enemy and then describing the hero conquering such a person brings much credit to the hero of the epic" (Shastri 1969: 16).

The number of descriptions, eighteen, stems from Daṇḍin. They may be regarded as tools in the crafting of epics, "compulsory or optional", as Heemachandra says, but without them – no epic genre. The fixity of their content should not, however, be overemphasized. For that the range of epic traditions in question is too wide. Rather, they must be viewed as broad, phenomenological categories, most visible to poeticsians conducting comparative work. (On phenomenological comparison, see Honko 1986b: 111–15; Honko et al. 1993: 13, 50–51.)

We have dwelt a moment on old-Indian poeticsians just to remind ourselves that the "motherland of epics" possesses noteworthy scholarship on the genre, comparable to Aristotle, and that the present craft of oral epic singers has a long history in India. Behind our empirically well-documented performances one may sense continuities which go back to traditions analyzed by early poeticsians. We are aware of the fact that the poetics of *mahaakaavya* may well comprise other great narratives than epics and that the gist of the rules is literary, not necessarily oral. Yet what we have here is a remarkable forerunner of an "oral-formulaic" analysis on a level which was never fully developed by Parry and Lord.

For the present need of a term denoting a broad phenomenological

category of content which is repeatedly found in epics we find "description" quite suitable. As far as we know, it has not been used by Western scholars in comparative work. The difference between description, episode and multiform will be elucidated below with examples. Description refers to large units of storyline; in the following example "Having a divine child" is a description.

Each description can be divided into several episodes. Episode has frequently, if not very systematically, been used in Western scholarship, mostly for units larger than a motif (cf. Dundes 1964: 30). We utilize it mostly on the surface level, mainly to segment linear texture. If used on textual or content level, it comes close to structural units such as the motifeme (cf. Dundes 1964: 59). Structural analysis is, however, of secondary importance for us at this point. We are more interested in the production of epic text from the point of view of memorable units and their role in the construction of storyline. Regardless of whether Walter Ong is right in his argument that in oral composing the plot is handled through an accumulation of episodes and not through the construction of a climactic storyline, the term episode for the smaller but visibly independent units of texture may not be out of place.

The term multiform has been occasionally but, again, not systematically used by epic scholars. Albert Lord himself could use it when referring to variants of a "theme" (1960: 113): he speaks of "the substitution of one multiform of a theme for another" (1960: 119) and says, when trying to balance the uniqueness of lines and the repeatability of themes in oral composition, that "the single performance is a multiform" (1960: 133). In one of his last articles he employed the term when dealing with "two episodes in the *Odyssey* in which someone seeks, and obtains, information". "They are multiforms of one another," he noted (1987: 322). Brenda Beck seems to use multiform occasionally for comparative purposes in the meaning of a "variant" (Beck 1982: 185). In his recent study *The Ballad Matrix* (1990), William B. McCarthy reassesses Lord's work and applies a version of oral-formulaic theory on ballads. He analyzes in detail Agnes Lyle's repertoire and states that one of her favourite formulas is the "Come saddle to me" commonplace. Its four realizations in different ballads "are all multiforms of the same basic structure and idea, both overall and line for line" (1990: 150).

It is difficult to say to what extent these and other authors have used "multiform" as a term or just as a descriptive word. The latter may often be the case, since the definition of the concept is not discussed. In our usage multiforms are, as stated above, "repeatable and artistic expressions of variable length which are constitutive for narration and function as generic markers". We need the term on the level of texture, so much so that the recognition of a multiform is de-

pendent on the presence of certain keywords. In such a usage, multiforms belong to the tradition system of one or more singers sharing largely the same linguistic tradition. A multiform is then not an abstraction of "text" or content in the manner of episodes and descriptions with which it may occasionally tend to coincide. It can but need not be a unit of, say, syntagmatic structure. Its primary locus is in the mind of the narrator or singer and possibly of other singers who belong to the same tradition. Its comparative analysis should take place within a shared tradition-ecological system; in a sense, it exists on the level of emic categories and should, at least ideally, be recognized by the singer(s). On the other hand, the production of multiforms may take place on a semi-automatic and thus unconscious level of the formation of discourse. For comparison, this may seem a relatively narrow focus but that is where we will primarily use it. Since some readers may feel the need to use multiform in a broader comparative context, we would like to suggest that a difference be maintained between systemic and phenomenological multiforms, the latter being not bound to one particular tradition system.

Steps on the path of composition

What about the terms needed outside the range of description, episode and multiform, i.e. those which denote larger or smaller units than these terms? Larger than description, at least for us, would be "storyline" or plot, a crucially important overall working order which the singer must be able to handle consciously and which he occasionally also "edits". He is normally able to divide the epic into "sub-epics" or "chapters", "cantos" or the like, i.e. part-narratives intertwined into a larger story. The old-Indian poetics called them by various names: Bhaamaha and Daṇḍin used *sarga*; Heemachandra listed *sarga* in Sanskrit, *aashvaasa* in Prakrit, *sandhi* in Apabhramsha and *avaskandhaka* in Graamyā (or folk speech) (Shastri 1969: 34). Our Tulu singer, Mr. Gopala Naika, uses the term *sandi* for fairly independent parts of the Siri epic but also for the whole epic. The sub-epic level is important because we may assume that part of the oral editing has consisted of integrating *sandis* which may originally have been composed and sung separately. Another reason is that singing is practically never oriented toward the production of the longest possible storyline. Instead, a "chapter" or "canto" is a normal point of departure for the delineation of a performance strategy. Even the sub-epic unit is mostly too long for a full-scale presentation and may require contextual adaptation, i.e., editing.

We are here speaking of length in terms of editing a story for a

newspaper, i.e., to an allotted space. The metaphor is not totally misleading, but as regards oral editing, it must be modified to stress the singer's point of view on performance strategy. First, the singer mostly thinks he is performing the story in full, regardless of the length of his presentation. This attitude derives from the "truth" (*satya* in Tulu) of his narrative, not to be compromised under any circumstances. Epics are "true stories", their moral grandeur, a characteristic of the genre, is based on this qualitative feature. From this angle the fullness of a story becomes related to the narrative context denoting approximately "as much as necessary for the larger storyline to continue" or "as much as possible in the prevalent context".

Another feature worth remembering here is the ability of multiforms to accommodate difference in length without compromising the plot. As was said above, dictated versions are about plot, not about poetic embellishment and emotion, and therefore they are generally shorter than sung versions of epics in most traditions. Gopala Naika's dictated version of the entire Siri epic is not 54.5% of the size of his sung Siri epic because of omitting important elements of the plot. It is true that some plot units are lacking in the dictated epic, but the same holds for the sung epic, too, i.e. certain plot elements prevalent in the dictated epic are lacking in the sung epic. On the whole, however, these differences are marginal. The dictated version does not, regardless of its smaller size, compromise the epic plot in any serious manner. To return to old-Indian poetics, a short size may affect the handling of emotions, not of plot. Multiforms serve both condensation and expansion. Their recognizability in fact makes also short-cuts possible without any compromise in the plot.

As an example of Gopala Naika's handling of multiforms it may be mentioned that he once abridged the Messenger multiform by letting the letter carrier go between the letter writer and the addressee only three times instead of five (TKU90A175). In the Mayisandaaya epic he made a short-cut and abridged the "Reaching for the lotus flower" multiform, but when this was pointed out to him, he sang a longer version of it (TKU93A165). The quarrel between Saamu and Koḍsaara Alva lasts in various forms 7–8 days before the wedding of Siri, but Gopala Naika preferred to condense it into one quarrel, commenting on the event itself in a humorous vein: *Avoñji sumaaru malla voñji raamaayana aapuṇḍu* 'It becomes something of a big Raamaayana' (i.e. epic!) (TKU90A181).

This means that in spite of multiform variation, the main storyline remains intact in most performances. In extreme cases, it may be argued, when a three-day-long Kootichennaya epic is contracted to half an hour of singing, the understanding of the presentation presumes some knowledge of the tradition in question. The truthfulness of the story is not in danger but old-Indian poetics might raise a

warning finger: an epic should not be too short.

The idea of an intact plot should not mislead us into thinking that the singer has little else to do than guard the plot. In fact, there are always variations and alternatives in combining elements of plot. One should remember that there are several narratives embedded in one epic, narratives which partly develop simultaneously and must be intertwined in linear telling. How this will happen is not necessarily clear to the singer at the moment when he begins to sing the epic. The ways of combining necessary plot elements will become clear to the singer only as he proceeds along the "path of composition". For Gopala Naika, the singer of Tulu oral epics, the keyword for this process is indeed *saadi* 'path'. Referring to two parallel developments, Kumara's departure to *maaya*, the divine world, and Siri's remaining life, he says: *Siri nanla juuvoḍe ulleru, nara-maanya lookoḍe ulleru, aarenu maayo benyara saadi, yiñci saadi poovoḍu, undoñji saadi raḍḍu saadi yittulekka* 'Siri is still alive, she is in the human world, the path of making her maaya [will follow], I must go along this path, it is like having two paths', and he continues: *Yii saadiḍe yitte voñji saadiḍe umbye podaandū kumare* 'along this path, this one path Kumara has already gone'. "I must go along that path" refers to the path of composition, along which the singer is moving the characters of the epic. Similarly, Gopala explains: *Daarunu voñji saadiḍe kaḍappuḍḍaandū* 'I have already sent Daaru along one path'. The progress of the main protagonist Siri in the epic takes place *sirina saadiḍe* 'along the path of Siri'. About his own choice (and choice there is!) of plot strategy Gopala Naika states: *aa saadigu pooyara unḍu* "Along that path [of composition] I should go." (TKU90A178.)

The persons in the epic are real and living in the singer's narrative vision: he must tell their life-stories truthfully and relate them properly to each other. He must be able to defend his solutions, should anyone in the audience wish to question some detail. Furthermore, he must deal with the epic figures as living humans, able to feel pain and suffer. Gopala Naika was keen on the placement of pauses in the singing of epic. According to him, he cannot stop in the midst of bearing a child, because that would leave Siri in pain: thus Kumara, Siri's son, must be born before the singer can make a pause. If he stops earlier, he says, "I feel like being hit with a fist" (TKU90A 171). Similarly, he cannot stop when singing about Kumara's return from *maaya*, the divine world, to Siri (followed by Siri's departure from *sooya*, the human world, and her journey to *maaya*). If we [the team documenting the epic] cut that story into pieces, "it will affect our body" (TKU90A182). Later he comments in a similar vein:

One can leave [singing] and stop after Kumara has gone to *maaya*.

If left in the middle, it will bring certain difficulties for those in possession and for Kumaras. So, in their body there is like a hidden fire burning, a fever, an inherent fever. If one does not finish thus, a fever will ensue. If we finish thus, it is like taking a pill and cooling down the fever. (TKU93A180.)

Toward the end of the Siri sub-epic there is a critical description (*gaṇṭu*) during which the singer cannot stop the narration:

In this way, if one has begun to sing a sandi about Ajjeru's death, one cannot stop the sandi between his death and his burning into ashes. Only after he has been burnt, it can be left and one can sit in silence. If we sing about his life and finish the sandi after his death, his corpse is still there. There is a sad task for her. One cannot leave it like that, no. Nowadays, such a thing may happen. However, the dead body should be burnt into ashes. Afterwards one could stop. This is called one *gaṇṭu*. (TKU93A180.)

Our psychologizing questions concerning the identification of the possession cult members with their mythical (epic) models began to irritate Gopala Naika, when they seemed to imply a manipulation of epic plot in relation to prevalent moods and problems in the audience. Those moods were impertinent and secondary to him whose task it was to maintain clear the "king's path" (*raajakida saadi*) or the "main royal path" (*mainu raaja saadi*), i.e. the progress of the epic story (TKU90A206). The sacredness of this task and the importance of the path of composition were once epitomized by Gopala Naika as follows: *Undu namma yeeka voṇjee saadi, deeverunavee, akulnavee voṇji kaṭṭukaṭṭale paṇḍondu poopuna* 'We have only one path: to sing about gods only, about their rules and regulations' (TKU90A205).

Sometimes the seams of narrative remain more visible than the singer would wish. One good example is the meeting of Siri with the kshatriyas Boliya Deesinga and Kariya Kaalinga, two kings and brothers, before the introduction of the story of Siri's second marriage. The scene takes place in the forest after Kumara, Siri's son from her first marriage, has declared his unwillingness to follow Siri to her new life and his wish to go to maaya. Siri has consented. Yet Kumara's voice is heard by the kshatriyas by their arrival to Siri in the forest. Here the problem is: can Kumara be sent to maaya before the kshatriyas hear his voice, and if not, where and when could Siri send Kumara to maaya after her encounter with the kshatriyas? Commenting on this seemingly unsolvable problem Gopala Naika uses terms which denote 'path [of composition]' and 'path of life'. (TKU90A177-178.)

We will return to the problem of smaller units when speaking of oral formulas (see below). Tentatively it may be said that a new kind of term will be needed to denote a "minimal move" within an episode or multiform in the progress of narration. Again, this need stems from our wish to look closely at the performance strategy and production technique of the singer. What are the points where narration which has kept lingering around one particular scene and event makes a forward move, however small? A minor change takes place, something happens or is done, a new dimension or perspective opens up. Since the term "move" has been used for a quite different purpose in fairy-tale research (cf. Propp 1968: 92 and e.g. Holbek 1987: 353, 383, 411ff., 452; Cardigos 1996: 37, 143–53), it is better to employ an unused term "step" for the function delineated here. A "step" as a term denotes those crucial points where the singer adds something not known before and takes a small step in narration, and lets the plot move ahead on the "path of composition". For obvious reasons, customary terms like motif, feature, incident or detail (cf. Dundes 1964: 30), are not very useful for denoting such steps in narration or the narrative segment between two consecutive steps.

Example 1: "Having a divine child" – a description and its multiforms

Let us now take a brief look at a description labelled "Having a divine child" which occurs no less than five times in Gopala Naika's performance of the epic of Siri. For considerations of space we will compare only three of the manifestations of this description, namely, the births of Siri, her daughter Sonne, and Sonne's foster twin sister Giṇḍye, thus leaving aside the births of Kooṭi Kumara, Siri's son, and Abbaya and Daaraya, Sonne's twin daughters. The latter two occurrences of this description are somewhat complicated, partly because the births, in spite of the divine nature of the children, are normal.

The description of Siri's birth begins with line 1682 in the epic, is 135 lines long and may be segmented as follows (e indicates "episode" and <M> the boundaries of a "multiform"; a double indentation indicates a "step"):

e1 <M Next day, the next day, today has come to Ajjeru.
 Naraayina Naaraayina dee.
 On the next day, the next day, Tuesday,
 Naraayina Naaraayina de oo Naaraayina oo,
 on Tuesday, at night time,
 cock's crowing time has come in Satyanapura,

- the morning star's light has come to Satyanapura.
 Naraayina Naaraayina de oo.
- 1 690 The time of sunrise came
 on the day of Tuesday, in the night.
 Naraayina Naaraayina de oo. **M>**
- e2 <**M1** By Ajjeru, Naraayina, by Ajjeru
 a voice is heard in Satyanapura palace,
 Naraayina, a crying voice is heard by Ajjeru,
 by Ajjeru sitting in the swinging cot.
 <**M2** "Naraayina, dear Daaru,
 Naraayina, dear Daaru,
 a forest without birds, dear,
 a palace without children this is. **M2>**
- 1 700 From where is a child's crying voice coming, dear,
 in our Satyanapura palace?" thus says Ajjeru,
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina, Ajjeru,
 Naraayina oo, Ajjeru. **M1>**
- e3 <**M** Ajjeru, leaving the swinging cot,
 the small front hall,
 searching, looking Ajjeru goes, see.
 Leaving behind the eastern portico
 to the silver tower with a handrail rope Ajjeru goes. **M>**
 In the silver tower with a handrail rope
- 1 710 from the stone coffer a child's crying voice is heard by Ajjeru,
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina oo, by Ajjeru.
 Running, fleeing Ajjeru goes.
 Ajjeru opens the lid of the stone coffer.
 <**M** Putting in his hand Ajjeru sees on the golden plate,
 in the sandal pill,
 in the grain of kunikuma, in the areca-flower bud, now,
 a girl child now is visible to Ajjeru's eyes. **M>**
- e4 <**M** Look! Suddenly Ajjeru now held that child
 in his arms.
 Carrying Ajjeru comes,
- 1 720 dancing, playing, laughing, holding the child
 Ajjeru comes,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru himself. **M>**
 After coming, Ajjeru now,
 Ajjeru having come, standing in the middle of the front hall:
 <**M** "Dear Daaru, dear Daaru,
 in our house, today, God Bemmeru gave, dear,
 the siri-fruit of progeny!
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina, dear Daaru,
 till yesterday, our palace, dear,

- 1 730 this palace was without children, dear Daaru!
 Today, this day, our palace, dear,
 is like a lighted lamp. God Bemmeru
 gave us, dear, the siri-fruit of progeny!"
 says Ajjeru, Naraayina, Ajjeru.
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina. **M>**
- e5 <**M** "For the god-given gift, Daaru,
 under the beam we should have a cradle hung,
 under the beam we should swing the cradle, dear Daaru!"
 says Ajjeru, Aarya Bannaaru Birnu Paalava Ajjeru,
 1 740 Naraayina oo Naaraayina, Ajjeru himself.
 Naraayina dee.
 Ajjeru had a bronze cradle prepared.
 Ajjeru had now a silver chain prepared.
 Ajjeru brought them to Satyanapura palace,
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina, Ajjeru himself.
 Naraayina dee.
 Ajjeru hung the silver chain to the beam,
 tied now the bronze cradle to the silver chain,
 Naraayina oo, Ajjeru himself.
- 1 750 Naraayina oo Naaraayina dee. **M>**
- e6 <**M** Naraayina Naaraayina oo.
 Four lineages Ajjeru invited
 to Satyanapura palace.
 During the nighttime now he made them assemble
 in Satyanapura palace,
 Naraayina Naaraayina oo, Ajjeru. **M>**
 <**M** The evil eye Ajjeru expels from the cradle
 under the beam.
 Holding now a lamp, a three-eyed coconut, Ajjeru
 expels the evil eye of the cradle, see, with the maidens
 of five lineages.
- 1 760 Naraayina Naaraayina dee oo. **M>**
- e7 <**M** At that time, a silk of sixty ells, Ajjeru,
 a silk he brought, cut into pieces in the middle, Ajjeru.
 A silk of thirty ells
 Ajjeru has made.
 Naraayina Naaraayina dee oo Naaraayina oo.
 "A silk covering the heavens," he said,
 spread it on the bottom of the cradle, Ajjeru himself.
 Together with the maidens of five lineages
 Ajjeru placed the child, the child
 1 770 in the cradle under the beam.
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina oo.
 On the chest a silk of thirty ells,

a silk covering the earth thus
 Ajjeru spread on the body,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru. **M>**

e8 <**M** Ajjeru held the four ropes.
 Holding the four ropes
 east, west, south, north,
 in four directions he looked.

1 780 Ajjeru now [recited] Raamaayana in the nighttime,
 Baarata in the daytime,
 praised Naralooka,
 sang the Naaraayina song,
 swung the child
 in Satyanapura palace, Ajjeru,
 Naraayina, Ajjeru is swinging. **M>**

e9 <**M** "To me at last, today, God Bemmeru gave this gift.
 A name to this child,
 in which manner to be given?" Thus he did the thinking.
 "From an areca-bud this daughter emerged,
 1 790 like a siri-shoot out of an areca-tree this child came:
 Thus the name of Siri I shall give, I shall give!" he said.
 "Naraayina, dear Siri!"
 said Ajjeru. **M>**

 <**M** The name, the family name he gave
 in Satyanapura palace.

 "In four kingdoms take four names, dear Siri!
 When you go to Addolige, dear,
 take thus the name Siri of Addolige, dear!
 When you go to Bañjolge,
 1 800 take thus the name Siri of Bañjolge, dear!
 When you walk in Satya,
 the name Siri of Satyamaalooka,
 the name, the family name do earn, dear!
 In four kingdoms four family names let there be for you!"
 said Ajjeru.

 The cradle under the beam he swung, the name,
 the family name he gave.

Naraayina oo Naaraayina. **M>**

e10 <**M** In Satyanapura palace,
 bringing up, nursing Siri of Satyamaalooka
 with love, affection, Ajjeru was there.
 1 810 Giving goat's milk when the cow ran dry,
 giving cow's milk when the goat ran dry,
 Ajjeru brought her up in Satyanapura palace.
 Today, baking broken-rice porridge for the child,
 today, Ajjeru brought up

child Siri of Satyamaalooka in Satyanapura palace.
Naraayina oo Naaraayina dee. **M**>

The description in the Siri sub-epic is divided into ten episodes. If the first (temporal) multiform were to be interpreted as an introductory step within the second, the number of episodes would be reduced to nine. Most episodes are covered by multiforms; only the introduction seems to be more unique. The relations between episodes and multiforms are as complex as could be expected in view of the fact that repeatability is a precondition for multiforms but not for episodes. Five episodes (1, 5, 7, 8, 10) are covered by one multiform in their entirety, i.e. episode and multiform coincide. Three episodes (2, 6, 9) are covered in their entirety by two multiforms. Two episodes (3, 4) show two multiforms and plain narration. In the second episode there is one multiform embedded in another. The main part of the description has been created simply by stringing multiforms.

As regards the division of the discourse into "steps", it is worth noting that most steps also function within tableaux or images. Because of the unity of time, scene and personage, a step may easily be visualized as one event involving basically one act by the dominant personage. From this angle, the work of the singer seems to consist of stringing images and events (steps) within them into a narrative order. The visionary aspect of oral composition is probably more important than our analysis, which is based on the models of written culture, is able to assess.

In the sub-epic of Sonne the description in question is shorter, only 98 lines. The singer paints with a few strokes episodes which he recently described so elaborately in the Siri sub-epic. One may ask whether this shortening is partly due to the unusual mode of performance, i.e. singing solo the entire epic from beginning to end to the same, partly expert audience. The singer may, in this case, recall what he has sung in connection with Siri and may not want to repeat himself with what he perhaps considers to be only stylistic embellishment not absolutely necessary to the development of the plot. On the other hand, when it comes to new episodes such as the catching of the divine child from a whirlpool, his discourse becomes detailed again. The description in the Sonne sub-epic (from line 9050 onwards) can be segmented as follows:

e1 9 050 <**M** Leaving a prosperous boṭṭu-field behind,
 the thousand-muḍi boṭṭu-fields, today, leaving behind,
 to the hundred-muḍi bayilu-fields Ajjeru descended.
 Through a large field for ritual procession,
 a field for playing football,
 along a bund of a vast muddy field with a flower-decorated

flower-pole as he goes, M>
 to Ajjeru's brook which has appeared today, by the side
 of the brook
 <M as Ajjeru goes looking,
 Naraayina, the beauty of needle-like seedlings Ajjeru saw.
 M>

<M At that side of the brook as he looks,
 to Ajjeru is visible, see, now:
 9 060 In the brook, now, in a deep pond of water,
 in water deep, in the water today, in a whirlpool,
 like an areca-flower bud floating appears
 to Ajjeru's eyes,
 to Durgalla Pergade Ajjeru of Kaanebottu.
 Naraayina Naaraayina de oo. M>
 Those words Ajjeru reflected:
 "What is this? I should see!" Thus he said,
 to the brook he descended.
 To the brook as he descends,
 a very beautiful girl child is visible to Ajjeru.
 9 070 <M In the pool of water, in a whirlpool of water,
 the child, today, is floating,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, toward Ajjeru,
 toward Durgalla Pergade Ajjeru of Kaanebottu. M>
 e2 <M "I should catch this child, I should catch!"
 Thus said Ajjeru.
 He took the shawl covering his body,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru.
 Ajjeru spread it to the water,
 Naraayini, Durgalla Pergade Ajjeru. "If the child is coming
 to Pergade-lineage,
 to my shawl-edge it should come!" said Ajjeru,
 9 080 the edge of his shawl he stretched,
 Naraayina oo, Pergade Ajjeru.
 Naraayina Naaraayina, to Ajjeru's
 shawl-corner the child,
 the areca-flower's child, came like a dancing areca-flower.
 She fell to the shawl-edge,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, to the shawl-edge of Ajjeru
 of Pergade-lineage.
 The child from the brook, from the pool of water,
 from a whirlpool of water,
 Naraayina, Ajjeru took in his shawl-edge. M>
 e3 9 090 <M "The palace was without a child – God Bemmeru
 gave to me!" he said,

- Durgalla Pergaḍe Ajjeru of Kaaneboṭṭu himself. **M>**
 <**M** Look! He took the child.
 Dancing, laughing with delight Ajjeru goes, see,
 to Kaaneboṭṭu palace.
 Naraayina, to Kaaneboṭṭu palace he took the child. **M>**
 <**M** To ten-sixteen maids he says:
 "Naraayini, maids, Naaraayini, servant maids,
 God Bemmeru gave me a siri-fruit of progeny!
 Naraayina, in a corner of our large field,
 9 100 in a pool of water, in the holy water
 this is the god-given gift to us,
 to Kaaneboṭṭu palace!" said
 Ajjeru himself,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru. **M>**
 e4 <**M** Thus for the child Ajjeru had now a cradle
 prepared.
 Ajjeru had a bronze chain, a silver cradle prepared.
 In a small front hall, in a decorated portico Ajjeru
 swung a swinging cot. **M>**
 Ajjeru now told
 to make the child lie down.
 e5 9 110 <**M** A silk of sixty ells he cut into pieces
 in the middle.
 A silk of thirty ells he put into the cradle.
 A silk of thirty ells
 Ajjeru put on the child's body,
 Ajjeru. **M>**
 e6 <**M** He removed, today, the evil eye from the child,
 from the cradle, made the child lie
 in the cradle,
 Naraayina, Durgalla Pergaḍe Ajjeru of Kaaneboṭṭu,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru. **M>**
 e7 <**M** He chanted Naralooka,
 sang the Naaraayina song.
 9 120 The four ropes he held,
 Durgalla Pergaḍe Ajjeru of Kaaneboṭṭu,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru.
 Chanting Naralooka, singing the Naaraayina song: **M>**
 e8 <**M** "To the child, to the born child,
 a name, a family name should be given!" he said.
 "What kind of a name should be given?"
 thus Ajjeru did the thinking,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru,
 Durgalla Pergaḍe of Kaaneboṭṭu.
 9 130 Naraayina Naaraayina de oo. **M>**

Even though Ajjeru did the thinking, he did not find
a worthy name for this child of prosperity.

<M A child found in a riverpool,
a child found in deep water,
a child found in a whirlpool coming round: M>

Sonne, Sonne, the name,
Ajjeru in Kaaneboṭṭu, Durgalla Pergaḍe Ajjeru,
has given the name,

Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru.

e9 9 140 <M With love and affection, today,
bringing up, nursing of that child in Kaaneboṭṭu,
Durgalla Pergaḍe is there, see.
Giving cow's milk Ajjeru brings up,
giving broken-rice gruel
Ajjeru now brings up,
Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru himself,
Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru. M>

Here the description has nine episodes. Multiforms dominate the presentation throughout. No fewer than five episodes (2, 5, 6, 7, 9) are handled with one multiform, i.e. episode and multiform coincide. Multiforms are occasionally much shorter than in the corresponding description of the Siri sub-epic. This observation seems to support the hypothesis that the singer has been under the impact of his previous performance of these multiforms to the same audience and opts for a shorter version.

In the Giṇḍye sub-epic the description (starting from line 9482) is 113 lines. After Sonne has been found and named, Ajjeru goes hunting and finds Giṇḍye in the woods and adopts her as a sort of divine twin-sister to Sonne. The idea of twins is clearly reflected in the Giṇḍye sub-epic. We get the following segmentation:

e1 <M1 As they go hunting in Puñja forest,
a voice from a stone cave is heard
in Ajjeru's ears.

Naraayina Naaraayina de oo.

<M2 "Hark, what is that voice?

What is this voice?"

Thus Ajjeru lending an ear is listening,

Naraayina, Durgalla Pergaḍe Ajjeru of Kaaneboṭṭu,

9 490 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru.

"That is not a bird's voice, an animal's voice surely not.

I am hearing a child's voice!" thus he said.

"Where is the child? Hark, where is it?"

Ajjeru says. M2>

Searching, looking as Ajjeru goes forward,
a stone cave is visible to Ajjeru,
Naraayina Naaraayina, to Ajjeru.

Bending down Ajjeru looked into the stone cave.
As he lends an ear, from inside the crying of a child
is heard. M1>

e2 9 500 "Alas, what a sin! Alas, what a shame!" says Ajjeru,
Durgalla Pergaḍe Ajjeru of Kaaneboṭṭu,
Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru.

"For me to go inside,
there is no chink! Hark!
It is not possible to bring the child out.
What to do? What to do?"
Thus Ajjeru does the thinking,
Durgalla Pergaḍe Ajjeru of Kaaneboṭṭu himself,
Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru.

9 510 He had, now, in a purse
four-rupee, four-rupee coins brought.
In a stone cavity in front of the cave
tinkling, tinkling Ajjeru poured them,
Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru,
Durgalla Pergaḍe Ajjeru of Kaaneboṭṭu himself.
Naraayina Naaraayina de oo.

In spite of that, Ajjeru cannot see the child coming.
From the palace Ajjeru had a bronze giṇḍye, giṇḍye,
such a ewer brought,

9 520 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru.
At the stone cave Ajjeru stood,
held a stick, the metal pot, today, the giṇḍye.
"Ding dong!" thus Ajjeru strikes,
Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru.

As he strikes the bronze ewer,
to the sound of bronze, – what did the child do?

It comes creeping from inside,
rolling, crawling from the stone cave
the child, see, comes,

9 530 Naraayina Naaraayina, to Ajjeru,
the child coming, coming, smiling, the child,
the child having come within the reach of Ajjeru's hands:

e3 <M "Naraayina Naaraayina de oo Naaraayina.
To the Pergaḍe-lineage if you child are coming, to me,
to my shawl-edge you should come, child!" Thus he said.
He took his shawl, stretched the edge of his shawl.

The child coming came.
In Ajjeru's shawl-edge, in the tip of the shawl

- the child was. See, a girl child!
- 9 540 Naraayina Naaraayina, a child! **M>**
- e4 <**M** At that moment, Ajjeru says:
 "Naraayini dee Naaraayiniyee,
 God Bemmeru, if he has something to give, he gives!
 Till today, a man without children,
 childless I have been.
 To me, now, God Bemmeru gave a child.
 A siri-fruit of progeny God Bemmeru gave!"
 Thus says Ajjeru,
 Durgalla Pergade Ajjeru of Kaaneboŋtu says.
- 9 550 Naraayina Naaraayina de oo. **M>**
 Ajjeru had the hunting stopped.
 <**M** He took the child.
 With love, affection he goes
 to his palace, de oo
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru. **M>**
- e5 <**M** Ajjeru had a bronze twin cradle
 prepared in Kaaneboŋtu palace.
 Ajjeru had the twin cradle hung.
 In the small front hall Ajjeru had
- 9 560 a swinging cot hung, see,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru,
 Durgalla Pergade of Kaaneboŋtu. **M>**
- e6 <**M** For the twin cradle, now,
 a silk of sixty ells Ajjeru cut in pieces.
 A silk of thirty ells he spread on one side, on the other
 a silk of thirty ells he spread,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru.
 The silk of sixty ells he had cut in pieces.
 Thirty ells, thirty ells Ajjeru had spread on the two sides.
- 9 570 The two children, too,
 in the twin cradle Ajjeru laid.
 A silk of thirty ells
 he spread on the child's body, on the body.
 A silk of thirty ells on the body, on the body he spread. **M>**
- e7 <**M** He chanted Naralooka, sang the Naaraayina song.
 Ajjeru held the four ropes. **M>**
- e8 <**M** "Naraayina Naaraayina, dear children!
 The child found in a whirlpool of water I named Sonne. **M>**
 <**M** You are the child found in a stone cave,
- 9 580 Naraayina, dear child!
 The ginḍye, the ewer as I struck,
 you child did come.

I name you Giṇḍye, Giṇḍye!" said
 Durgalla Pergaḍe Ajjeru of Kaaneboṭṭu,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru. M>
 e9 <M In Kaaneboṭṭu palace,
 Naraayina, Ajjeru,
 Durgalla Pergaḍe Ajjeru very beautifully
 bringing up, nursing the children is there, see.
 9 590 Naraayina, giving cow's milk he brings up the children.
 When the cow went dry,
 Ajjeru had broken rice, broken rice given.
 He brought up the children very beautifully,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru. M>

Again there are nine episodes. This may be incidental but could also indicate the existence of a similar syntagmatic format in these three occurrences of the description. The first episode is structurally similar to the second episode in Siri: there is a multiform embedded in another. The independence of the "interior" multiform is substantiated by textural evidence elsewhere, namely, when the kshatriyas hear a crying voice in the forest (cf. above). Thus episode 1 has two multiforms and episode 2 is without multiforms (although not without formulas!), the latter being very elaborately sung and basically unique. The rest of the description is clearly dominated by multiforms: no fewer than five episodes (3, 5, 6, 7, 9) are identical with one multiform; one of them (7) is short indeed (2 lines) compared to its manifestation in the case of Siri (10 lines) and Sonne (9). Two episodes (4, 8) include two multiforms each which do not, however, cover the episodes in their entirety.

Our comparison of the three manifestations of the divine child description clearly shows how the singer prefers to utilize multiforms but does not try to memorize them. On the contrary, if he has sung the same passage to the same audience recently, he may even wish to avoid too much similarity. In its first performance a multiform is usually longer than in its later manifestations, although this is not to be conceived of as a rule. The idea of the sung epic as a discourse for developing emotions applies just here: if you sing something which is both new and important for your processing of meaning in the epic, you are likely to elaborate it and accumulate emotive tension, whereas if you sing something which you have already sung once or twice, you are likely to feel that a comparable penetration into detail is not necessary. The meaning is already being carried by way of intertextuality. This is corroborated by the fact that entirely new passages often get very detailed handling. The variation in multiforms comes from their generally good integration into co-textual material and particular plot features in the actual passage.

When repetition occurs, it is a tool for adding emotive importance to the event at hand, which may result in a sort of doubled multiforms, as in the first episode of the *Sonne* sub-epic, where Ajjeru first sees and then finds the child in a whirlpool.

A comparative survey of the three versions studied above reveals a similarity in the syntagmatic structure of the "Having a divine child" description. The similarity becomes more accurate toward the end of the description, whereas the introduction varies according to the need to integrate the description to the preceding part of the storyline. The frequency of multiforms shows a similar trend, i.e. they are more frequent and cover larger parts of discourse toward the end of the description.

TABLE 1: Episodic structure of the "Having a divine child" description

SIRI	SONNE	GINDYE
e1 time	child from whirlpool	crying voice
e2 crying voice	Pergade's shawl	child from cave
e3 child from areca	Bemmeru's gift	Pergade's shawl
e4 Bemmeru's gift	cradle	Bemmeru's gift
e5 cradle	silk	cradle
e6 expelling evil eye	expelling evil eye	silk
e7 silk	chanting Naaraayina	chanting Naaraayina
e8 chanting Naaraayina	name-giving	name-giving
e9 name-giving	love and care	love and care
e10 love and care		

It may be assumed that there are memorable units on three levels. First, on the level of descriptions, the singer must consciously command the possible placement of the unit in the overall storyline. Secondly, on the level of episodic patterning, he must be able to recall the basic syntagmatic structure of the description at hand. Thirdly, on the level of actual composition, he must be able to integrate the description to the preceding part of the evolving plot and create space for both new elements and multiforms. This is the conscious, strategic part of his work of "emplotment" – to use Paul Ricoeur's term (1991: 21). Parallel to it, another less conscious or "semi-automatic" process is at work: the verbalization of expressions, mostly familiar from earlier performances, ranging from a general linguistic arsenal to more genre-specific formulas, runs (of names, for example) and multiforms. Verbalization is only one part of the total performance, intertwined with melody, rhythm, dance, gesture, etc. When reading the texts, we should never forget that the verbal part is just one component in a symphonic totality. The processing of meaning in an oral epic is, again, governed by that totality of expression, not by words alone.

Example 2: Multiforms in dictated and sung performance

Few scholars make a clear distinction between a dictated and a sung epic text. Even fewer allow for the various types of textualization called forth by the mode of performance, performative style and the context of performance. The best research, which in most cases requires personal fieldwork and "thick" materials, has in the past few decades begun to show an interest in precisely these distinctions. Various opinions have emerged on the relations between dictated and sung versions, for example. A difference between dictated and sung texts became observable in the Serbo-Croatian materials of Milman Parry and Albert Lord; they saw the poetic limitations placed on verse-making in dictation, yet felt that dictation "may be instrumental in producing the finest and longest songs" (Lord 1960: 128). Operating with three categories, dictated, recited and sung epics, and having documentation for each of them, occasionally even by the same singer, Parry and Lord created a totally new level of accuracy in the study of oral epic style (cf. Parry & Lord 1954: 8–20). The idea of "finest and longest songs" to be achieved by dictation has not, however, gained much support in later research. As pointed out above, Brenda Beck found the dictated version of the Tamil epic she studied contentwise and stylistically impoverished and much shorter than the sung version (Beck 1982: 59), and the testimony of our Siri epic is similar in this respect: the dictated version is just over half (54.5%) of the sung version. Even this percentage is misleading, because if we were to compare the number of words instead of the number of lines, the difference would be even greater in favor of the sung version. Dictated epic discourse is, it would seem, more a listing of events with less or none of the embellishment inspired in the sung version by the melody alone. Neither have a fixed meter, both are based on a strongly rhythmic recitation, but interestingly, the "less poetic" dictation shows more regular (and shorter) length of line.

As indicated above, the observation of multiforms offered key insights into the differences between dictated and sung texts. It was not so much the presence or lack of multiforms but their different treatment which seemed to work in favor of the sung and against the dictated texts. There are a few passages and episodes in the dictated version of the Siri epic that are missing from the sung one. The introductory and concluding parts of the sung version as well as minor episodes are missing from the dictated one. These discrepancies do not, however, spoil the plot. The basic difference lies in the presentation of the multiforms, in broader or narrower form. To illustrate this, let us examine a brief excerpt from the epic in both dictated and sung form. The first excerpt is a 17-line section from the dictated epic (Siri B) containing three successive multiforms. The phrase material re-

curing in the corresponding segment of the version sung more than four years later (Siri A) is printed in boldface in the dictated Tulu and the English translation.

SIRI B (762–778):

<M **ajuppo molatto baara patte yini**
 tottilugu paadderu ajjeru
naalu baritta ponulenu baru malttuderu
 765 satyanapuroda yerammanegu .
 naraayina ajjeru naaraayina ajjeru
baalenu tottiludu jeppudiyeru M>
 <M **naalu ballu pattuderu ajjeru**
naralooka tudittuderu ajjeru
 770 **naraayina pada paaduderu ajjeru**
 naraayina ajjeru naaraayina ajjeru M>
 <M satyodu puttina baalenduu
 satyamaalookonda **sirindu**
 letteru ajjeru **pudaru diidiyeru ajjeru**
 775 naraayina ajjeru naaraayina ajjeru
addoligegu pconaga adyage sirindu
pudaru dettonla maga panuppere ajjeru
 naraayina ajjeru naaraayina ajjeru M>

<M A silk of sixty ells, today,
 he put in the cradle, Ajjeru.
 The maidens of four lineages he made come
 765 to Satyanapura palace,
 Naraayina, Ajjeru, Naaraayina, Ajjeru.
 In the cradle he placed the child. M>
 <M He held the four ropes, Ajjeru,
 praised Naralooka, Ajjeru,
 770 sang the Naaraayina song, Ajjeru,
 Naraayina, Ajjeru, Naaraayina, Ajjeru. M>
 <M The child born in truth
 as Siri of Satyamaalooka
 Ajjeru called, gave the name, Ajjeru,
 775 Naraayina, Ajjeru, Naaraayina, Ajjeru.
 "When you go to Addolige, the name Adyage Siri
 take, dear!" says Ajjeru,
 Naraayina, Ajjeru, Naaraayina, Ajjeru. M>

The multiforms here are Silken Cradle (6 lines), Caring (4) and Name-giving (7). An important feature also visible in the earlier examples is the use of boundary lines between multiforms (and/or episodes, steps). They consist of what we call Naraayina lines, a repeti-

tion of one or more words found in the preceding lines combined with the refrain-like use of the word Naraayina (Vishnu) and rhythmically conditioned filler words or syllables. This usage opens up a vista on the emic segmentation of the song as perceived and regulated by the singer: it concludes or begins a unit by creating a clear boundary between two line sequences. The boundary line does not add any information to the narrative. It is not a "step". Its presence creates a kind of semantic pause in narration. Its use in the dictated performance is not, understandably, as common as in the sung version, where the melody and rhythm of recitation often make it expand to two or three lines.

Drawing the line between the song units is not, however, quite so simple, since the boundary line may not exist or it may be placed within the unit. This is the case with the first multiform, the last line of which comes only after the boundary line. For some reason the singer wanted to link the laying of the child in the cradle of the first multiform with the rocking of the child in the second. It appears from other occurrences of the Silken Cradle episode and the sung version of the epic quoted below that placing the child in a cradle hanging from a beam and rocking the child are two different events between which time has passed. The placing of the infant in the cradle by the lineage maidens denotes acceptance, a legitimation of the new family member soon after its birth, whereas the Caring multiform represents early childhood.

This 17-line dictated episode corresponds to the following 46-line sung episode containing the same three multiforms but in greater breadth:

SIRI A (1761–1806):

- <M naateene porttuguu najippo mulotta baara
paṭṭe najjeeru**
koṇḍoo battidi paṭṭe naḍuvara tuṇḍu oo malutteru najjeru
muppo mulotta oo baara paṭṭendu oo
najjeree maluttina unḍuu
- 1 765 naraayinaa naaraayina deē oo naaraayina oo
aakaasoo aḍeṅgalla paṭṭe paṇḍeru
toṭṭiluḡu naḍiyaaroo naasuyere najjeree taanu oo
baaleneē ainu bari ponnuleneē
voppatappa maluttoonu oo toolaḍi toṭṭiludeē
- 1 770 **baaleneē jeppuḍuderu najjero oo**
naraayina oo naaraayina oo
tigaleḍa mittuu muppo mulotta baara paṭṭe oo
buumi madevolla paṭṭendu
meyikkū paaḍuderu oo najjeru oo
- 1 775 naraayinaa naaraayina najjeru **M>**

- <M naalu balluu pattuderu najjero oo
 naalu balluu pattonuduu
 muḍaayi paḍḍaaiyee tenukaayi baḍakkaayee
 naalu dikku tuuvonderu oo
 1 780 najjeeru nanaa raatreda raamaayana pageluda baaratoo
 naralooko tuḍitteruu
 naraayina pada paadiyeruu
 baalenu vocciyeru
 satyanapurodaa yerammanedu najjeru oo
 1 785 naraayina najjeruu vocciina unḍu oo M>
 <M yenkaandala yinigu deeveru bemmeru koruna
 pursaadandu oo
 undonji baalegee pudaruu
 vovvonji riitidu diipunandu yoocane malutteruu
 baale pingaaroḍu oo uddi udipaanoda magalu unduu
 1 790 kaṅguḍu siri battilekkondi baalendu oo
 siriindu panuppi pudaruu diipe diipendu paṇḍere
 naraayina maga oo siriyee
 paṇḍeru najjeru M>
 <M pudaru porappu oo diiduyere
 1 795 satyanapuroda oo yerammanedoo
 naalu raayoḍu oo naalu pudaru dettonula magaa siriyee
 naddoligegu poonaga magaa
 addoligeda sirinduu pudaru dettonula magaa
 bañjologegu poonagaa
 1 800 bañjoligeda sirindu pudaruu dettonula magaa
 satyoḍu naḍappunagaa
 satyamaalookanda sirinduu
 pudaru porappu paḍḍula magaa
 naalu raayoḍu naalu porappu nikku yippaḍu paṇḍeru najjeruu
 1 805 toolaḍi toṭṭilu oo vocciyeru pudaru porappu diidiyeru oo
 naraayina oo naaraayinaa M>

- <M At that time, a silk of sixty ells, Ajjeru,
 a silk he brought, cut into pieces in the middle, Ajjeru.
 A silk of thirty ells
 Ajjeru has made.
 Naraayina Naaraayina dee oo Naaraayina oo.
 "A silk covering the heavens," he said,
 spread it on the bottom of the cradle, Ajjeru himself.
 Together with the maidens of five lineages
 Ajjeru placed the child, the child
 1 770 in the cradle under the beam.
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina oo.

- On the chest a silk of thirty ells,
 a silk covering the earth thus
 Ajjeru spread on the body,
 Naraayina Naaraayina, Ajjeru. **M>**
- e8 **<M Ajjeru held the four ropes.**
 Holding the four ropes
 east, west, south, north,
 in four directions he looked.
- 1 780 Ajjeru now [recited] Raamaayana in the nighttime,
 Baarata in the daytime,
 praised Naralooka,
 sang the Naaraayina song,
 swung the child
 in Satyanapura palace, Ajjeru,
 Naraayina, Ajjeru is swinging. **M>**
- e9 **<M "To me at last, today, God Bemmeru gave this gift.**
 A name to this child,
 in which manner to be given?" Thus he did the thinking.
 "From an areca-bud this daughter emerged,
 1 790 like a siri-shoot out of an areca-tree this child came:
 Thus the name of Siri I shall give, I shall give!"
 he said.
 "Naraayina, dear Siri!"
 said Ajjeru. **M>**
 <M The name, the family name he gave
 in Satyanapura palace.
 "In four kingdoms take four names, dear Siri!
 When you go to Addolige, dear,
 take thus the name Siri of Addolige, dear!
 When you go to Bañjilige,
 1 800 take thus the name Siri of Bañjilige, dear!
 When you walk in Satya,
 the name Siri of Satyamaalooka,
 the name, the family name do earn, dear!
 In four kingdoms four family names let there be for you!"
 said Ajjeru.
 The cradle under the beam he swung, **the name,**
 the family name he gave:
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina. **M>**

The dictated episode amounts to only 37% of the sung episode. It contains all that is essential to the main plot but not all parts of the fine structure of the multiforms. The multiforms are not entirely homogeneous. They consist of parts that may be called "motifs" or "steps" according to whether the emphasis is on their ability to appear in-

dependently or their position in the narrative process. The term "step" refers to the pace and dynamics of composition and is equal to the minimum amount of new information needed to carry the narrative forward. Delay is vital in creating epic breadth. It also gives the singer an opportunity for embellishing, for developing a more powerful poetic image, for binding a feature of content to what has gone before, for underlining meaning and adding emotional emphasis. Epic relies on the art of tarrying; a leisurely pace, or rather a lingering on over certain expressive points in the plot is an integral feature of epic art, without which it cannot exist. As we can see, multiforms do not in themselves represent a slow pace any more than they do a fast pace. They are used in both.

It would hardly seem necessary to prove that the sung version is more artistic (i.e. more in keeping with the rules and potential of traditional poetry) than the dictated version. The singer finds it difficult to develop the fine structure of a multiform in a performance based on dictation. In the present example, the Silken Cradle multiform is divided in dictation into three steps: first the silk is placed in the cradle (lines 762–763), then the lineage maidens are invited (764–766) and the child is placed in the cradle (767). The sung version has five steps: spinning the silk (1761–1765), placing the silk at the bottom of the cradle (1766–1767), calling the maidens (1768–1769), placing the child in the cradle (1769–1771) and finally placing the other silk over the child (1772–1775).

Whereas the dictated performance is content to list the three main events, the sung version creates a logic between the details and develops the *silk* as the poetic key to the multiform. The silk ceases to be a mere piece of cloth and is transformed into a focal symbol with many meanings: it represents the respect felt for a child of divine origin, its vast quantity underlines the child's high status for Ajjeru, it acquires mythical proportions "covering the heavens, covering the earth" and thereby makes the cradle the center of the universe, and it acts as a tie between the kin and its new member. These meanings are admirably reflected in the ring form of the episode: the multiform begins with the silk and ends with the silk; this is the main factor creating the parallelism – not just verbal but semantic parallelism, too. It not only opens and closes the multiform; it blends the symbolic meanings at the levels of thought and action. Here is, in a nutshell, the essence of epic art.

The Caring multiform is heterogeneous in both the dictated and the sung versions in that it is made up of two different motifs which nevertheless have the same semantic role: they describe the passing of the relatively long childhood period during which Ajjeru cherishes and "teaches" the child. The first motif is dismissed in the dictated version with a single line (767), whereas in the sung version it

takes the form of a cosmic description (1776–1779) in which Ajjeru protects the child in his care from the dangers that may be threatening it in all directions and/or makes the directions (gods?) aware of the importance of the child. The second motif in the dictated version is a eulogy to the human world (Naralooka) and the chief god Vishnu (Naaraayina), whereas the sung version (1780–1785) includes a whole lesson in wisdom: this is acquired by reciting the great epics, Raamaayana by night and Mahaabhaarata by day. The artistic molding of the image has the same function as the previous multiform: the child rocked in the cradle is the center of the universe and in contact with all its dimensions, both physical and spiritual.

The Name-giving multiform is adequately summarized but the treatment is again fragmentary in the dictated version. It has two parts marked off by boundary lines: the foundation of the main epithet of the personal name including the name giving (772–775) and the attribution of an additional epithet (775–778). The basic structure is the same in the sung multiform, even though the boundary line between them is, somewhat surprisingly, missing. Instead there is a boundary line-like step at the beginning of the multiform: the statement that the child is a gift from God (Brahma, 1786). The other elements are the setting of the task (1787–1788), the foundation of the personal name (1789–1791) and the name giving itself (1782–1795). The foundation of the name Siri is absent in the dictated version but the foundation of the main epithet Satyamaalooka is given in both, even if in a slightly different contextualization (“born in *satya* [truth]” vs. “walking in *satya*”).

The other main element of the multiform describes the future sphere of power of the Siri child. The singer is presumably referring to the time following the events in the epic when Siri, having completed her life on earth and been elevated as a mythical exemplar to the divine sphere, is worshipped at the annual Siri festivals in the local temples. The image is a feudal one, but realistic: the land belongs to largish estates ruled by their owners in the manner of kings. Only three of the four kingdoms are mentioned by name, so there is still scope for further epic expansion. The structure of the epithet-attribution episode is as follows: the list of names (Addolige 1797–1798, Bañjolige 1799–1800, Satyamaalooka 1801–1803) is framed by almost identical lines (1796, 1804), and the multiform ends with a refrain in the nature of a boundary line (1805), the caring motif of which is interwoven with the multiforms preceding the name giving, thus giving the telling greater semantic cohesion. The Naraayina line (1806) confirms that we are at a boundary.

This example illustrates the creation of epic breadth by extending the multiforms. It is useful because both performances took place in a similar induced context without the limitations and variation caused

by such factors as ritual or work context, different mode of performance and performative style. The analysis of multiforms may be continued by increasing the number of occurrences. This may be achieved by picking out more incidences of the same description with largely the same multiforms occurring at different points in one performance of the Siri epic, as was done in the above, and by comparing them in some more detail, as will be done for a few multiforms in the next example. The logical continuation would be to compare the "behavior" of the same multiforms in the different performances of the Siri epic by the same singer, in this case, Gopala Naika, but this task will not be undertaken in this paper. The same is the case with the locating and comparing of the occurrences of the same multiforms in other epics known to him, an exercise in intertextual perspectives.

Eventually one may venture beyond the borders of one singer's tradition system and compare the use of multiforms by different singers. Here, too, our study will pass through many zones: first, singers within the sphere of Gopala Naika's direct influence, e.g. his Siris and assisting Kumaras, secondly, singers whose performances he has witnessed and whose traditions he may have internalized, and thirdly, singers from more distant Tulu tradition areas which may show only indirect contacts, if any, with the tradition systems we are studying. It seems obvious, however, that exhaustive documentation of the epic tradition of a single singer will also provide comparative research with firmer ground than the usual thin samples of epic register collected haphazardly from many singers in several areas. In such "thin and broad" materials the possibility of studying variation in realistic terms is almost totally lost.

Example 3: Variation of multiforms in one performance

In the previous example we focused on the comparison of the same passage of the Siri epic taken from two performances several years apart. Both stemmed from a similar induced context, and one was dictated and the other sung. Our findings corroborated the view that the dictated version remains much shorter than the sung one, that it lacks much of the embellishment and poetic detail typical of the sung version and that the main concern of the dictating singer is the creation of a correct and fairly "full" sequence of the main elements in the plot, not so much the processing of connotative meaning and emotional emphasis. For the latter, only the sung performance offers the right mental and technical environment through the presence of melody and rhythm. That is why epic art is in full bloom in the sung mode.

This is a generalization we have some reason to believe to be true,

at least to a certain degree. But as with all generalizations, one must critically look for its limitations. One necessary modification, not possible to develop here properly, concerns the unevenness of both the dictated and the sung performance. Dictation is laconic, matter-of-fact and without embellishment, but not always. There are passages where the singer develops detailed descriptions and multiforms, not different from those found in the sung performance. Singing usually produces long and poetically elaborated forms, but not always. There are passages which are terse and short, occasionally shorter than in the dictated version. It will be the task of a special study to find out the reasons for such fluctuation, a study which must compare not only the dictated and sung performances of the Siri epic as such but also the internal variation of multiforms within both modes and possibly also in other comparable performances.

As the smallest possible sample of that internal variation, we would like to draw attention to Gopala Naika's use of the Silken Cradle, Caring and Name-giving multiforms within one sung performance. For the purpose of comparison we will take the lines 1761–1795 from the Siri sub-epic (see pp. 47–48, 59–61 above), the lines 9110–9139 from the Sonne sub-epic (see p. 51–52) and the lines 9563–9585 from the Giṇḍye sub-epic (see p. 54–55). To make the passages comparable, the latter part of the Name-giving, i.e. the giving of epithets, must be eliminated from the Siri sample, because it has no correspondence in Sonne and Giṇḍye.

Thus unified, the three text passages have 35 (Siri), 30 (Sonne) and 23 (Giṇḍye) lines. We have here the possibility of seeing how the singer handles the same multiforms in three renditions within one performance. One would expect that within such a short timespan the multiforms consisting mainly of fixed phrases and formulas would remain quite similar. This is not the case. On the contrary, some differences are quite staggering. Yet the meaning of the telling stays the same.

The metaphorical presentation of the Cosmic Silk, the feature emphasizing the difference between the dictated and sung performances in the previous analysis, is found only in Siri (15 lines). In Sonne the same multiform is only 5 lines, one line less than in the dictated version! Our assumption in the above that the singer did not wish to build a fuller multiform similar to what we had heard in Siri, is the best guess we can offer to explain the startling difference. In Giṇḍye again, the same multiform is 12 lines, long enough for an artistic treatment like in Siri, but we get nothing of the kind. The texture is repetitive and slightly clumsy. Yet it indicates the possibility of an extended time slot for the multiform. By way of performance, the Giṇḍye passage is closer to Sonne than Sonne is to Siri. The terse handling of the multiform in Sonne seems to invite longer treatment

soon after in *Giṇḍye*, but the latter does not develop into the same beauty as in *Siri*. The extreme shortness of the passage in *Sonne* may have invited an addition, a multiform about dispelling the evil eye from the cradle, an element which is not uncommon in similar ritual contexts but absent from the corresponding passages in *Siri* and *Giṇḍye*.

The Caring multiform is, in spite of its two-part structure, the shortest one: 7 lines in *Siri*, 6 in *Sonne* and only 2 in *Giṇḍye* which is short indeed considering that the dictated version had 4 lines. After this observation there is no need to postulate that the most concise manifestations of multiforms are to be found in the dictated performance. On the contrary, succinct solutions appear from time to time in the most artistic sung performances, only why and when is hard to explain.

The last multiform of the passage, Name-giving, is 10 lines in *Siri*, 16 in *Sonne* and 9 in *Giṇḍye*. The evenness of length is not matched by an evenness in content. Both *Siri* and *Sonne* initially pose the choice of the name as a problem, but in *Siri* it is solved at once by referring to *Siri*'s emergence from areca (betel-palm) bud (several meanings of *siri* available to support the choice), whereas in *Sonne* there is an epic delay emphasizing the difficulty of the task: *Ajjeru* first fails to find a name, probably because the normal method of picking the name does not work with a child of divine origin. Only then does *Ajjeru* decide that the child's discovery in a whirlpool in the river must be the basis for naming; a perplexing conclusion at first, until we realize that the appellative *sonne* 'nought', 'medial letter o in Kannada script' may be conceived as an image of a whirlpool. In *Giṇḍye* the problem stage is bypassed by a direct reference to the solution in *Sonne*, and the *giṇḍye* 'ewer' which *Ajjeru* struck to force the infant out of the cave may serve as the foundation. Such references show that the singer is aware of his multiforms. In the case of *Sonne* and *Giṇḍye* the reference legitimizes the interpretation that the two children emerging at short intervals constitute a pair of divine twin sisters.

The main conclusion to be drawn from this comparison of three renditions of the same multiforms sung fairly closely one after another is that variation is much more extensive than any folkloristic theory concerned with text analysis is likely to admit and that there is no ideal "master" length or content for a multiform. Yet it may be said to contain mainly fixed elements, such as phrases and formulas. These fixed elements do vary also, but that does not solve the problem of variation in our case. The solution must be sought in the composition technique of the singer.

The use of multiform as the comparative unit is probably apt to do justice to the full range of oral textual variation otherwise easily lost

from sight. The forms of that variation cannot be disclosed without "thick" materials which have been almost totally absent in most folklore research hitherto. Consequently, theories on folkloric variation, at least in long and complex forms, would have to be reviewed drastically.

Multiforms and emic categories

Are multiforms categories which the singer is able to recognize or at least unconsciously use in his work? The best answer at this point of our research probably is: we do not know. There are indications that Mr. Gopala Naika is aware of the multiforms he uses, but they may not be sufficient to prove that he sees the units and boundaries of the text which he produces in performance in the same way as we see them. Yet we feel that our extensive interview materials with him contain elements which will in due course enable us to pursue the question further. Additional interviews are also possible but slightly problematic because the temporal distance to performances to be analyzed is growing and the singer's system of tradition has lived on and developed in a way which we have not followed at close range after the little more than three-year fieldwork period. The connection to field experiences documented in the past with him may not always be easy to establish. But this is really only one side of the coin.

What is an "emic" category, we might ask. It is something, we think, which is obtained from the singer and not invented by us scholars. How do we learn about such categories? By listening to the singer's speech, which, as in our case, may contain professional treatises on poetic problems on which he is a better expert than we are. This is the conscious part of our exchange. We try to learn to look at certain categories in his way, if not fully, then at least closely. In this work we may rely upon his own formulations and various terms he uses. Yet this is not the only way to reach emic categories.

The other part of our exchange consists of our observations concerning his poetic behavior. We see him use categories or units for which he may not have a term or which he may not even recognize. Yet they are his, not ours. To be able to speak of these discoveries, we must go to the brink of invention: we must give names to the units and phenomena observed. We must, at least in theory, deal with three sets of categories: (1) those which he recognizes himself as categories and for which he gives names; (2) those which he would probably recognize, if they were pointed to him, but for which he may be unable to give names; and (3) those which he would not recognize under any circumstances, because he is using them unconsciously, or in an automatic way (like grammar), or at an "implied knowledge" level

of cognition. So the emic work is really cut into two halves, one of which is the singer's responsibility and the other the scholar's contribution. Pure emic work hardly exists, not even in the extreme case that our singer learns to read and write and conceives his own poetics in writing (such works have existed in parts of Asia) and invites us to read it. Even then, the situation of co-operation would be re-established, because the singer would not have seen everything that there is in his and other singers' poetry and would ultimately be unable to answer certain queries based on our observations on his poetic behavior.

So much for the ideal emic. In realistic terms, it will be best to denote our basic set of terms for epic segmentation (sub-epic, description, episode, step) as etic, not emic. This is because the whole enterprise is so scholarly designed and aims at a full coverage of text. Even if we have indications that the "episodes" and "steps" with which we operate above to a large extent stem from Gopala Naika's decisions (cf. the role of boundary lines!), we cannot always be sure, and it would be meaningless to cross-examine him on the issue, since the rapidly coming "steps" are categories better observed than discussed, and since his view on "episodes" is to be understood better along the lines of the "path of composition" (cf. above) than in terms of our segmentation work. Thus episodes and steps are best interpreted as etic segmentations for comprehensive, overall purposes, not likely to interest the singer on a conscious level. The possibility that they occasionally coincide with the singer's conscious or unconscious categories, can not be ruled out.

The nature of multiforms is somewhat different in this perspective. Since we are keen to preserve the textural link between the manifestations of a multiform, we may assume that a link between the occurrences is also there in the singer's mind. The demand for a full coverage of text, which makes the episodes and steps so etic, does not apply to multiforms. The main criteria for the use of the term are repeatability and textural similarity, which are very natural characteristics from the point of view of the singer's work of composition. Thus we maintain that multiforms are closer to emic categories than episodes and steps. Their flexible use near the textural level makes them useful tools as we venture to explore the formation of the singer's units of composition.

It is not our aim to begin to harvest the rich yield of emic terminology we have elicited from the interviews with Gopala Naika. It is abundant in comparison with our etic terminology and seems to host fairly clear categories but also perplexing, almost synonymous terms whose mutual relations need further clarification, a clarification which may or may not be available, because his descriptive use of "terms" does not always require relational analysis.

Quite often Gopala Naika's terminology guides and corroborates our findings. An example is the clear distinction he makes between the dictated (calling it *kate* 'story', 'plot', 'telling') and the sung (i.e. *sandi* 'epic') performance of epics. The main differences between them are textual length and "voice" (*soro*), which term denotes not only 'voice', 'melody' and 'singing' but also 'wording', 'poetic detail' and 'content'. In several interviews (e.g. TKU90A168, 171, 205-207, TKU93A180) he has commented on the difference:

Kate means telling very slowly, telling from one meaning to another meaning. Sandi is sung in a voice. While singing [the singer] lengthens it a little. -- When singing what we call sandi, the voice increases a little, you see, it becomes larger. Kate is said short, that much. (TKU93A180.)

For Gopala Naika, dictating the epic is more difficult than singing it; the extra time is a problem, not a resource. The free flow of singing is the ideal mode of performance:

So, when telling the kate, this full power cannot be brought about. For those who write down, you see, there will be a little, some small [problems]. One must tell stopping all the time. Look, while performing the sandi one should tell rap rap, beating all the time. One [piece] joins another in a connection. Telling the kate this connecting does not happen. While stopping all the time, the telling does not proceed. Once you stop suddenly, you are forced to think. Where did I stop, from where to start again, one must begin to think.

You see, I feel good when performing the sandi. You see, it goes knitting together, look! You see, it can be sung knitting with voice together, joining together.

The sandi is more pleasant, more pleasant. Performing in the sandi style is pleasant. Performing in the kate style is not so pleasant.

So, it does not come right unless my heart is in it. So, a little will be left aside if I must think what to do. So, while writing down, some aksaras might have been left aside, thus it was not proper. If I perform the sandi, therein it is complete, in it my heart delivers. (TKU93A180.)

His term *aksara* (< Skt. *akshara* 'word', 'syllable', 'letter') refers to the smallest units of composition, not so much to 'word' as to 'step' and even 'episode'. Occasionally it may be translated as 'expression',

'idea', 'belief' (TKU90A206) and 'line (of epic)' (TKU 90A205–206), too. Even 'kinship designation' (TKU90A202), 'title' (TKU90A170) and meanings without the idea of a small unit occur, such as 'description' and 'version of the epic' (e.g. TKU90A201). For the new sequence of episodes in the beginning of the Siri epic he uses the expression *muujaksara* 'three [a few] episodes' (TKU90A201). The term *tappaksara* means 'error', 'wrong expression', 'wrong idea' (TKU90A170–171, 201). For a single word he sometimes uses the term *oñjaksara* 'one word' (e.g. TKU90A175). Describing his composition technique Gopala Naika once pointed out that *undula maata aksarogu sammando patṭunave panle* ('All of this is connected to aksaras, you know') and felt that during half an hour's singing "only a few aksaras will be in it" (TKU93A180). The latter statement certainly has nothing to do with the smallest units of composition such as words, formulas or phrases. It rather refers to units on the level of episodes.

In an interesting remark which corroborates what was said above about the unevenness of style in dictation, Gopala Naika discloses that dictation actually is a mixture of two styles:

This does not have a kate form. Look, even when I told, there was one and another part in the sandi style. Also that dictated one has features of sandi style. So, the difference between these two is that the one sung in voice thus becomes a sandi. The other one is partly in the sandi style, too. I have put Naraayina wherever Naraayina was needed. I have mentioned Ajjeru wherever Ajjeru was needed. But while [singing] instead of one naraayina, two naraayinas would appear. While singing, while saying naraayina, the singing generally gets longer. In the other [dictation], the saying of naraayina becomes somewhat short. (TKU93A180.)

As regards other emic terms for segmentation, Gopala uses the words *ganṭu* ('joint', 'node') and, more rarely, *kaṭṭe* ('platform', 'halting place', 'stage'), *portu* ('moment') or *yegge* ('branch', TKU90A175) practically synonymously for larger subunits such as 'description', 'episode' or 'stage'. He uses expressions such as *yegge yeggedavu* and *ganṭu ganṭu* for singing 'episode by episode', e.g. *yeenu undu ganṭu ganṭu pandunda yaavatte* 'if I sing episode by episode, is it not enough' (TKU90A175). In the following he compares the singing of such units to the uninterrupted chanting of mantras and goes on to give more examples on larger units of composition:

In Ajjeru's epic, from one stage to another stage means: eastern portico is one kind of a *ganṭu*. Eastern portico, western sidehall, small

front hall, decorated portico, writing hall, dressing room, the silver tower with a handrail rope, Ajjeru left the sleeping mat, that is one *gañtu*, look! While chanting mantras, look, it is said within one breath, when that many mantras have been chanted, then a knot is put; it is a *gañtu*. That is called a *kañte*.

As a rule, the following different [units] are there: in Satyanapura Ajjeru leaves the sleeping mattress, lies down on the floor; just after that a Brahmin comes there. As he comes, he [Ajjeru] is delighted, that is one *portu* ['moment', 'stage']. Coming there, the Brahmin foretells and goes to *maaya*, which is another delight, it is another *gañtu*, look! Ajjeru was in misery, the telling about the removal of Ajjeru's misery is a delight, another *gañtu* ends there. It becomes another *kañte*. Afterwards, the birth of Siri is another delight. So, the construction of Lookanaadu, the construction of the temple, all these are works of delight. Arranging the festival for *buutas*, arranging the god's ritual procession, having the serpent worship performed, all of these are works of delight, it constitutes one *gañtu*. The birth of Siri is a delight for the man. As a rule, these are the three delightful events. After that, for the singers of *sandi* and for Siri, there is Ajjeru's death and the burning of the corpse. (TKU93A180.)

According to Gopala Naika, an epic or *sandi* is thus divided into parts (*gañtu*, *kañte*, *portu*, *yegge* etc.) which in turn consist of smaller components (*aksara*). His emic system is not very different from our set of segmentation terms according to which an *epic* is divided into parts (*descriptions*, *episodes*) which in turn consist of smaller components (*steps*). Our ideal task will be to penetrate his system as far as we can and reach a clarity comparable to our system. This will require painstaking re-examination of more and more terms, such as *santoosa* 'delight' in the last quotation.

Oral-formulaic theory and its limitations

It may be asked what the relationship of multiforms is to oral formulas. The fact is that the oral-formulaic theory fails to answer the questions which interest us most. We are more interested in the by-products of the theory, e.g. Parry's and Lord's ideas about the learning, "remembering", "memorizing" and producing of epic text. Oral-formula theorists have spent much energy on establishing whether particular texts were originally oral or not. In our case, this is not a problem, except when we proceed, for example, to analyze semiliterary epics, such as the Kalevala. Even there the oral sources of the

epic are so well-known that a statistical analysis with the help of formulas would be meaningless.

Scholars like Brenda Beck and Gene Roghair have largely refrained from the oral-formulaic theory, partly because of the low density of formulas in the South Indian epics which they studied (see Beck 1982: 60–69, 188–94; Roghair 1982: 40–69; cf. Smith 1987: 596–97; 1991: 20–30), whereas S. M. Pandey (1982) and John D. Smith have gone the opposite way and found in their North Indian epics “an extreme reliance on themes and formulae”, as John D. Smith puts it (1987: 598). The difference between the scholars seems, however, to derive to a great extent from different definitions. Pandey clearly applies formulicity to a maximal variation mixing performative styles, meters and melodies with episodic structure in a way which may serve his analysis but is perplexing to many readers of the oral-formulaic theory (cf. Pandey 1982: 58–59). Smith again adopts on the one hand a “minimalist viewpoint” where “the ‘simple verse’ is indeed identical with the ‘simple theme’ ” (Smith 1991: 21), but applies formulicity also to broad descriptions of events: “... every battle in *Pābūjī* is the same battle, every journey the same journey, every meeting the same meeting” (Smith 1987: 598). It is difficult to say whether the limitations of the theory or its application or the particularity of Indian epic materials are to blame, but the results do not encourage us to force the theory to do things which it never was meant to do.

The basic limitation of the oral-formulaic theory is, in our view, its starting point. Milman Parry’s dissertation focused on formulas only half-a-line long, on attributes and epithets which, having once been chosen, seem almost irreplaceable or inevitable under the strict metric rules. This constitutive beginning from the smallest texture unit made the theory very slow indeed to approach larger units and the rules of their application. Much of the struggle with formulas has been to expand its area of use with the help of “formulaic”, by relaxing the metric requirement, etc. Yet the results are somewhat doubtful. In ballad research, for example, the development has gone so far that ballad types are being classified as “formula ballads”, “formulaic ballads”, etc. (McCarthy 1990: 153); this hardly has any connection with the original idea but indirectly gives testimony of the limitations of the theory.

The fact remains that Parry and Lord never paid enough attention to the overall storyline or narrative structure. The oral formulaic theory is almost naive in its neglect of comprehensive narrative models and its innocence in relation to contemporary structuralist trends. “Formula” was and remains most useful in the analysis of semi-automatic narrative competence, within attributes and addresses, phrases and designations, one-line-long or half-a-line-long expres-

sions, and that is where we will use it. In this paper, however, we will not even start the project of singling out formulas. In our epic they are fairly frequent, and the most interesting observation on formulas so far is their variability: even short two- or three-word formulas tend to develop an amazing number of variants. This discovery partly contradicts the postulated formulaic economy according to which formulas are there to save unnecessary variation and offer the best choice.

Even "theme", apparently the closest term to be compared with multiform, is somewhat unclear in its orientation to form and meaning. Lord's definition speaks about "groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale in the formulaic style of traditional song" and refers to "the same basic incidents and descriptions... met with time and again" (1960: 68). For McCarthy, "a 'theme' is a sequence of narrative elements; the formulas and commonplaces used to express that 'thematic' sequence can vary from ballad to ballad and text to text" (1990: 152). He refers to Lord's dictum according to which "the theme, even though it be verbal, is not a fixed set of words, but a grouping of ideas" and proceeds to say that "a 'theme' is a deep structure" (1990: 153).

Since "theme" either tends to remain a relatively short unit of composition or tends, in its broader application, to lose its connection with texture and to become a plot unit similar to episode, it cannot be an equivalent to multiform in its tradition-ecological application. Possibly the second, phenomenological application of multiform – which we have mentioned above but do not use – comes closer to the broader application of "theme", but since we cannot be sure, we will not recruit the term for our analysis. For our analytic purposes, the bondage between multiform and texture is of crucial importance.

Oral performance strategy and composition

It may seem that the enigma of epic composition is largely solved by assuming that the production of epic text is based on a chain-like knitting of multiforms. Yet the matter is not that simple. For example, multiforms are not absolutely necessary for epic narration. Certain passages in the epic may be expressed without any observable multiform, i.e. there exists an epic discourse, a kind of plain narration, without easily repeatable and artistically elaborated expressions. In fact, multiforms belong to the realm of the focusing of meaning, creation of emotions, embellishment of detail and elaboration of expression. They are carriers of epic art, not merely of epic plot. This concerns especially the longer forms of multiforms. As

pointed out above, multiforms may also be contracted to minimum sizes, mostly at the expense of poetic effect.

Where oral-formulaic theory is deeply involved in the minimal elements of oral composition, our approach starts at the opposite end: the overall storyline and the singer's performance strategy. We wish to examine the mental text and the outline of the epic plot in the mind of the singer. By "mental texts" we do *not* refer to fixed wordings of expressions kept in the memory and reproduced in performance. Instead, a mental text consists of storylines, episodic patterns, images of epic situations, multiforms, remembrances of earlier performances and other memorable units in a pool of tradition internalized by the singer of epics. The entire epic repertoire of a singer is in this pool, a kind of store from which he/she may choose the "elements of production" necessary for a particular performance. This intertextual pool of poetry consists of narrative models not only based on his own active repertoire but also on more passive layers of tradition, heard from other singers but not yet integrated into any of the singer's mental texts. Distinct epics reside in this pool not just as elements but as prearranged sets of elements, as distinct mental texts, yet not fixed but open to editing and new combinations of "elements of production".

We may visualize the store of epic and other traditions as a mental library where order is being maintained through the personal tradition system of the singer. The mechanisms of learning and storage, search and recall, selection and adaptation are important subjects of study in themselves and constitute the basis of that process which leads to one particular performance. Mental texts are not stable (although some may be more stable than others) and they alter and develop during the performance career of a singer. We deem it appropriate to speak about the editing of mental texts because empirical evidence shows that singers take their time in preparing their performances and that they also outline conscious changes in storylines and episodic patterns. The very idea of mental text presupposes the development and growth of the epic material, changes in the customary narrative models and the integration of new elements into the epic outline.

Performed versions of an epic may be viewed as possible realizations of the mental text, not as authoritative or "master versions" of the epic. The number of possible variants is much larger than even the most meticulous documentation of an epic can disclose. Variation itself is wider and more dramatic than recognized by scholars working on a thin mass of poetic texts. It takes different forms, from permanent changes ("great" or diachronic variation) to temporary ("little" or synchronic) variation and is based on the adaptation of tradition to a particular milieu (cf. Honko 1981: 19-22; 1986b) and the processing of meaning (cf. Honko 1986a). The art of multiforms provides

a guarantee of continuous variation on the levels of text and texture; old and new combinations of memorable units are produced in every performance.

Multiforms seem to hold a strategic position in the textural composition. The storyline and the "path of composition" endow the singer with the possibility of engaging himself in epic embellishment and the recruitment of multiforms. The moment he prefers elaboration to plain narrative, the store of multiforms is open to choice. Through multiforms it becomes possible to regulate both the length and the emphasis of narration. Multiforms are reproduced in a semi-automatic fashion, "aksharas begin to invite each other", as the singer of Tulu oral epics, Mr. Gopala Naika puts it. Yet the borderline between conscious composition and automatic reproduction is fluid. The shorter elements (e.g. formulas) tend to be more "frozen", i.e. less variable, than wider multiforms (and descriptions) and their reproduction represents what cognitivists call "implied knowledge", models unconsciously stored in the memory.

Alongside formulas and fixed phrases it is possible to postulate a role for "keywords", paramount concepts and expressions most likely to become reproduced in the creation of a particular multiform. Keywords representing the linguistic level of expression enable the singer to keep track of the emplotment; they are like hooks on the performative horizon to which the singer may throw his epic thread. If the singer deviates or becomes distracted from the storyline, e.g. by excessive embellishment or creation of emotions, he may look for the next "hook", a keyword in the next episode or step which, once recalled, will "invite more aksharas" for the construction of the next passage, possibly a multiform, in a semi-automatic fashion. Keywords create a safe atmosphere for epic composition.

We assume that the singer's performance strategy is profoundly affected by the situational context, such as the composition of his audience, the available time frame and the requirements of collateral action (working technique, ritual). In our fieldwork case in Karnataka, there are three basic situations of epic performance: singing in the paddyfield, in the possession ritual, and in the induced context of our documentation of "full" epics. Another guiding factor is the mode of performance, i.e. the means of presentation by which the epic story will be staged (solo, dialogue, chorus, dance, instrumental music, etc.). A third factor is the performative style. Performative styles are many, ranging from linear third-person narration to emphatic first-person telling, peppered with different dosages of tense-switch, melodic emphasis, repetition, etc. All these factors must be accounted for before we analyze the units of epic discourse, e.g. multiforms, because they constitute the contextual frame into which the mental text of an epic must be fitted. It is this frame which brings about the ac-

tual range of variation and the conditions for processing epic meaning.

In a videofilm produced for the ISFNR congress held in January 1995 in Mysore, we illustrated the three most important singing contexts of the Siri epic. The first is intimately linked with a working technique, i.e. the plucking of paddy seedlings from a ricefield to be moved and planted in another paddyfield nearby. Nine women and one man, our singer, Gopala Naika, make a line which moves forward plucking seedlings to the rhythmic accompaniment of singing the Siri epic. Gopala Naika does not pluck all the time but acts as the lead singer, occasionally giving his role to one of the women, Kamala, who alternates with him in the singing, mainly by way of repetition or paraphrase. The other women may join them in the refrain or exclamations.

This is probably one of the best situations for learning the epic in a non-induced context. The performative style employed is a linear narration mainly in the third person. The length of singing is regulated by the work: when enough seedlings have been plucked, they are carried in bunches to the next field, where planting begins to the accompaniment of other songs, i.e. *kabita* or work songs. These function largely in the same manner as the portions of epic sung on the previous field, but their content need not be sacred as is the case with the Siri epic. Many worksongs are humorous, scornful of masters, even obscene, especially in the absence of men, others reiterate favorite legends and tales, often in a concise metric form. The paddyfield is the women's realm: their interests govern the choice of songs.

The second basic performance situation is linked with ritual, in this case the so-called *daliya*, where a score of Siri women are performing in a night-long possession ritual led by the epic singer and possession priest Gopala Naika and his two male assistants. There are seven female roles and one male role in the epic with which the performers identify themselves in an ecstatic manner during the ritual. The identification and possession are brought about by the singing of the epic, first at considerable length by Gopala Naika, later also by his male assistants and the Siri women. The assistants are not, however, very skilful singers and only four of the women are able to sing longish passages. All the participants join in singing the chorus-line or refrain.

This is the sacred performance context of the epic. Religious emotions and ritual behavior with many non-epic ingredients set the pace for the singing. For various reasons the situation is not very good for learning the linear text of the epic. At least three performative styles are employed by the lead singer: first, a linear narration mainly in the third person, secondly, emphatic singing in the first person and, thirdly, a non-linear, non-narrative exchange of lines and

exclamations based on the epic but mainly serving to create short dialogues between performers, to give instructions or adhortations to the participants, to regulate the emotions actualized in possession and to conduct the ritual sequence of events. The length of singing varies greatly, but only in the pre-midnight part of the ritual is there a lengthy (60–80 min) singing of the epic. The switch from one performative style to another seems to express the arrival and presence of a divine power residing in the areca bud from which Siri, according to the myth, was born.

The third performance situation represents an induced context: the singer was given full freedom to sing the Siri epic as he prefers from beginning to end. Because of the length of the epic and the limitations of the time frame and collateral action in work and ritual, this never takes place in the non-induced contexts described above. In this case the singing took seven days from sunrise to sunset. Gopala Naika had never sung the epic at such length (15,683 lines) before, but he had it as a mental text in his mind. As mentioned above, the dictated version of 1986 is much shorter (8,562 lines). Despite the novel context, Gopala Naika was happy with the result and enjoyed the chance of undisturbed continuous singing. The performative style he employed was all the time the same, linear, mainly third-person narrative. In spite of its length, the longest version proceeds faster than the emphatic ritual singing, which easily stops to elaborate on some detail important for the ritual. It thus contains more epic text than any other performance and constitutes a prime field for observing the use of multiforms within one epic.

We are studying multiforms primarily in the tradition system of Gopala Naika. Customary folkloristic methodology would call for variants from other singers and regions. We are curious enough to open that path of research but only later and mainly for secondary reference. By allowing into our material texts from persons and regions whom our singer never knew, we would annihilate the systemic cohesion of our texts and fail in our aim to study multiforms in epic composition as a living system. In its present state, our "thick" material focussing on the poetic ideas and composition techniques of one talented singer of long oral epics is too valuable to be diluted through scattered and superficial comparisons.

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The Rhetorical Persistence of Traditional Forms in Oral Epic Texts

JOHN MILES FOLEY

Exordium: From Performance to Libretto

A traditional oral performance, whatever its linguistic or cultural background, is, as both the Oral Theory and the Ethnography of Speaking eloquently testify, an experienced event that becomes a text only at the high price of intersemiotic translation.¹ What, then, do we make of those works of verbal art that took shape in or under the influence of oral tradition, but that presently survive – for historical reasons – only as texts? Do the expressive qualities we have been attributing to experienced events also apply, even if in some modified or reduced fashion, to such necessarily and exclusively textual objects?

These questions have, of course, engendered a considerable debate over the status of verbal art from oral tradition that exists only in a manuscript or on the printed page, with some commentators denying admissibility to anything outside the living, experienced event as recorded on acoustic or video tape and contextualized by the field-worker's direct, engaged participation.² Only in this way, they contend, can the performance be understood as an event; only in this way can some facsimile of the full, multi-channel communication be conveyed to the "outsiders" who have been permanently ostracized by lack of direct access. Since texts are already removed from the performance and preserve only a limited and decontextualized record of that performance, they in effect make even the scholar closest to them an "outsider" who can never recover the multifaceted reality that lies behind them.

For a comparatist interested in learning what living oral traditions can tell us about the long-defunct (read: "manuscript-prisoned") verbal art of ancient Greece and medieval England, this issue is in-

¹ For a fuller exposition of the major principles discussed in this paper, see Foley 1992, 1995.

² Cf. the discussion between Dennis Tedlock (e.g., 1983, 1990) and Dell Hymes (e.g., 1981, 1994).

deed a crucial one. Having labored both in the field and in the archive, and having many times wished fervently that the Codex Marcianus Iliad or the unique Cotton Vitellius A. xv. Beowulf – or their precursors – could be reinvigorated just long enough to glimpse (or aurally review) the performances that were their ultimate contexts, I have felt the challenge and the frustration of trying to tailor comparison judiciously.³ The contention that performed, experienced event are not and never can be equivalent to textual cenotaphs cannot be gainsaid; they are not superimposable media, and we cannot pretend that they are. At the same time, however, I question the extreme conclusion that we must therefore forsake comparison, completely segregating the oral traditional performance from the oral traditional text, learning nothing about the textual residue from firsthand acquaintance with enabling events in the same or other traditions.

In this respect I concur with Dell Hymes, who in his 1977 study of ethnopoetic structure in Chinookan tales sought to admit manuscript records to the discussion, noting that “the best dictated texts are not in fact wholly without indication of the features in question” (338). Similarly, in a review of the Dauenhauers’ anthology of Tlingit narratives, he compliments the editors’ use of works taped from oral tradition and scored for ethnopoetic rhetorical features, nonetheless evenhandedly observing: “Yet what was written down early in the century is an important part of the heritage as well. Its pauses and intonation contours cannot be recovered (although perhaps sometimes guessed at), but its rhetorical pattern can be inferred and made plain. The absence of oral recordings is not a bar.” (Hymes 1989a: 238.) Notice that Hymes nowhere claims that the dictated text is as faithful a representation of the performed event as an acoustic or video recording, or better yet the fieldworker’s personal witness to the contextualized experience; he acknowledges the shortfall in medium and the reduced fidelity with which one can represent a living performance in a script or libretto. But he does hold out for the importance of the partial but finite gain – in the case of the tales he studies, the vestige of continuity between the living oral tradition on the one hand and, on the other, texts taken down from dictation before the advent of instruments that allow the encoding of more expressive (and receptional) channels.

The situation is fundamentally the same with ancient Greek and medieval English manuscripts that provide our only windows on oral traditions forever lost to us as performances. We must begin, as Oral Theory has frankly been loath to do, by not only admitting but stipulating and setting a calibration for the documentary nature of the

³ On the opportunities afforded by, as well as the limitations of, comparative analysis of traditional oral epic, see Foley 1990, 1991.

evidence.⁴ We do not have Homer's performances; we have texts of uncertain provenance that first surface as whole works almost two millennia after their probable date of composition. And we do not have a performance of *Beowulf*; we have a manuscript, again of uncertain provenance, probably written in the first third of the tenth century, with the encoded version of the poem having been composed, depending on which theory of "origin" one chooses, as long as three hundred years before that copy or much more recently. In its earliest incarnation, Oral Theory saw fit to level these comparands to a single hypothetical standard, so that acoustically recorded epic from then-Yugoslavia was placed alongside the manuscript sources (although each textual tradition was also itself quite different from the other) without adjustment. This enforced equivalence stemmed, of course, from the Theory's overly narrow focus on traditional oral narrative as fundamentally a species of text, that is, as an object or set of objects that could be analyzed and quantitatively measured.⁵ With Hymes, then, I would subscribe to the first step in responsible comparison as entailing a recognition of differences, an honest effort at an informed analogical procedure through which one can investigate similarities and differences without demanding absolute congruity or imputing absolute disparity.

To give the picture its full and realistic complication, we should also acknowledge the possibility, in many cases the virtual certainty, that the classical and medieval texts are not always simply dictations from performances. That is, given the presence of at least incipient literacy at the time of their supposed (re-)creation in extant form, as well as the vagaries of transmission during the so-called Dark Ages of Homeric Greece and Anglo-Saxon England, original composition-in-writing of the surviving documents (or their direct antecedents) cannot be ruled out. Scholars have labored in vain to demonstrate the "pure orality" of such works – whatever "pure orality" might mean, especially in the complex cultural milieu from which the Homeric epics and *Beowulf* emerge – and tenable theories of composition, transmission, and also reception must now take into account the heretofore heretical hypothesis that these works of verbal art, while drawing on deep roots in oral tradition, were written out by the very word-smiths responsible for their present form.

I refer to "word-smiths" as a lexical avenue to the basic, rationalizing issues subtending the forbidding morass of texts that, while certainly texts, still encode vestiges of oral traditional performance. For, all complications aside, the most fundamental concern of our inquiry must remain the "word-power" wielded by these "word-

⁴ See esp. Foley 1990: chapter 2.

⁵ On the history of the Oral-Formulaic Theory, developed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord, see Foley 1988.

smiths". If, in the first instance of complication, we have available only a dictated text as a mute monument to the living performance in all of its multifariousness, then we may seem to have lost the enabling event, the empowering experience that transforms both the expressive and perceptual quality of the message and prescribes a certain mode of reception. To put it more accurately, the enabling event has been (at least in part) submerged into the rhetorical fabric of the text. This means that we lack certain of Richard Bauman's "keys to performance" (1977; see also 1986), most obviously the vast panoply of signals conveyed through paralinguistic phenomena, and such features will almost certainly remain forever unrecoverable.

But – and here is the crucial point – we have not lost *all* of the keys to performance. If as audience or readers we are prepared to decode the signals that survive intersemiotic translation to the medium of texts, and whose recognition will require some knowledge of the enabling referent of tradition, then performance can still be keyed by these features. What of special codes, for example, as imaged in the archaisms of South Slavic epic and charm? Do these metonymic cues not pepper the texts of Homer and *Beowulf*, serving notice that a particular kind of speech-act, taking place within a circumscribed performance arena, is in progress? What of figurative language, parallelism, and special formulae? Are these not equally characteristics of the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and much Old English poetry, and does their presence – in forms as simple as metrical predispositions and phraseological rules – not help to determine the channel through which the communication must be interpreted? In short, are the registers of ancient Greek and Old English traditional oral narrative not at least partly preserved in the admittedly reduced textual record that survives?

If these questions are answered in the affirmative, as I believe they must be, then our responsibility as a reading audience attempting to fashion as meaningful a context as possible for expressive acts is radically affected. No, the manuscripts are not performances, not experiences; but yes, they not only retain the linguistic integers that constituted the meaning-laden idiom of the actual events in oral tradition, but, even more crucially, they hold open the possibility of access to the implied array of associative, metonymic signification that such a medium or register was uniquely licensed to convey. The "way of speaking", as Hymes has put it (1989b), once fashioned as a communicative instrument that promoted highly focused and highly economical interchange, is also a "way of signifying", and its word-power, though necessarily diminished by the shift from performance to text, may survive.

This scenario assumes, as indicated above, an audience or readership sufficiently acquainted with the signals embedded in the regis-

ter to be able to summon the special, institutionalized meanings that are those signals' reason for being. Without that level of participation, the communicative act is denatured, and it makes little difference whether the act involves a performance or a text. To put the same matter in other words, the scenario assumes an audience who can rhetorically simulate the performance arena – in the absence of the actual enabling event of performance itself – on the basis of textualized cues that engage the enabling referent of tradition. It is, in brief, prior experience with the communicative channel opened by a particular kind of event that will inform the reception of subsequent related events and, to a diminished but still finite degree, of their textual recensions and yet more distantly related descendants.

At a second level of complication, which emerges when we take into active account the possibility or near-certainty that some texts are not simply oral dictations but also at least partly the result of composition-in-writing, it will again be the performance register and its signals that demand interpretation through examination of metonymic meaning, that is, through an understanding of how performance is keyed. Even in the later stages of the medieval period, when authorship is more and more taking on a new phenomenological status and we can begin to speak more meaningfully about "literary" composition, the context provided by immanence and performance will continue to be an important dimension of poetics and verbal art. As long as the communicative medium remains the dedicated register forged for and in performance to convey meanings that institutionally impinge upon the individual event, and with the proviso that there also remains an audience alive to the encoded signals for interpretation, then we must continue to respect that register's significative force, in short its word-power.

Thus it is that, as silent and intersemiotically reduced as the libretti left to us by the Homeric and Anglo-Saxon traditions most certainly are, they cannot be dismissed as simply "literary texts", without qualification, tacitly assimilating them to the familiar textual model. The integers of expression and reception, the cognitive categories that function optimally only within the enabling event of performance, retain in their textual forms a rhetorical vestige of that performance that cannot be ignored. Only now the channels are fewer, the keys more limited, the performance-based significative options more restrictive; in turn, the path for the development of inherently textual signification broadens. Does this sea-change mean that we as readers can no longer "perform" such works, no longer serve as a participating audience in their construal as emergent, evolving experiences? I think a measured response is truest to the issues of poetics and verbal art that lie beneath that question: while we should recognize that we can never wholly resuscitate textual libretti and cause them

to live again (or for the first time) as actual performances, we will be derelict in our interpretive duty if we do not reach beyond the parallax induced by their textuality and release the resources of meaning that stem ultimately from the performance and immanence that still inform them. In an effort to understand just how traditional, performance-centered integers can retain word-power even within a textual idiom, let us examine more closely the processes involved in textual transposition.

The Riddle of Incipient Textuality

What becomes of oral traditions committed, in myriad ways, to textual form? How does this textuality – “incipient” in that it represents either a historical culture’s initial known attempt at such codification or a relatively rare document adrift in a sea of living oral tradition – deal with and convey the textless world that preceded it or exists alongside it? Another way to put the same question is to ask how and to what extent a given text continues the tradition of reception.

In the early stages of inquiry into oral traditions and texts, whether from the point of view of folklore or of literature, and whether with primary emphasis on living or no longer living traditions, the simplex model of spoken versus written words seemed adequate. A corollary of this Great Divide theory held that oral traditions and texts sorted neatly into separate categories not only within a given culture’s repertoire of discourse modes, but across the worldwide spectrum of cultural diversity. Such reductionism then led to further excesses of various kinds, such as the Oral Theory’s original contention that ancient and medieval *texts* could be proven *oral* by quantitative means, and that, once proven so, would necessarily have to be interpreted – all of them – according to one particular code.

Recent years have of course witnessed the problematizing of this initial set of assumptions, as Oral Theory, Ethnopoetics, and the Ethnography of Speaking have all sought to avoid crippling generalizations and to complicate our understanding of verbal art in oral tradition, and of literature with roots in oral tradition. Thus it seems only proper, before moving on to a discussion of the survival of oral traditional strategies as textual rhetoric, to spend a few moments with one of the most intriguing aspects of this new concern for complication: the linked questions of how, why, and with what implications an oral traditional performance actually becomes a text, and, correlatively, what impact the answers to these questions might have on the nature and interpretability of the text. In what follows I naturally attempt neither an exhaustive review of all available in-

formation nor any grand, overarching principles that rationalize all known cases; either aim, in addition to being foolhardy in itself, would run counter to the very trend of pluralization and distinction I have been trying to describe. What is offered here instead is simply a small collection of inherently interesting and hopefully instructive instances of the range of dynamics involved when performances become libretti.

Native American Traditions

Let us begin with Native American traditions and texts, an area that has seen substantial activity over the last two decades as many of the most forward-thinking linguists and folklorists have turned to this body of traditions in attempting to come to grips with the ungraspable phantom of faithful textual representation. The approach often called Ethnopoetics has been at the forefront of this discussion: in particular, Dell Hymes and Dennis Tedlock have pointed the way toward modes of representation that recall the event-centered, oral/aural reality of the works they are examining and making ever more available to others. The common thread connecting their highly individualistic versions of Ethnopoetics is a concern that the endemic expressive structure of the narratives be recovered and made the fundamental basis upon which Native American verbal art is presented and interpreted. Instead of forcing these narratives into an essentially irrelevant form under the patently false premise that western European (and fundamentally Greco-Roman) poetics constitutes a universal set of categories, they have insisted on tradition-dependent identities for the works they study.

Let us concentrate here on the implications of Tedlock's and Hymes's methods for the transformation of performance to libretto. Tedlock's procedure with the Zuni stories (1972) consists of mapping the oral event onto an augmented textual surface designed to bear more and different kinds of meaning than can the conventional printed page. His criteria for this encoding derive entirely from the unique event of performance, and reflect traditional strategies of expression only to the extent that the individual event is representative of the performance tradition. The thrust of his text-making, then, is by usual standards a kind of overdetermination of the reader's activity, a mandate to exit the silence and convention of the usual process and to give (or restore) voice to the "dead letters" of the printed page. What he aims to preserve in this intersemiotic facsimile amounts to the set of cues – partially reflective of Bauman's keys to performance or the metonymic signals that are the stock-in-trade of Immanent Art (Foley 1991) – that shape the reader's recep-

tion of the work, only now with the reader also becoming a listening audience. In short, Tedlock has transformed the heard reality of the oral traditional event into a visual, textual rhetoric, specifically a set of typographic cues, with the express intention of mitigating the displacement caused by textualization of that event, that is, of making the text speak.

Tedlock's subsequent move toward what he calls "ethnopaleography", which consists of "taking the Popol Vuh text back to those who continue to speak the language in which it was written" (1987: 143), illustrates yet more radically the thrust of his overall interpretive program. Instead of attempting an analytical parsing of the textual document, he advocates restoring its voice, breaking the silence to which time and script have condemned it by direct appeal to an ongoing speech tradition. The success of this appeal depends on at least two crucial factors: i) some degree of continuity between the ancient text and the modern oral traditions that are to be its comparands, and ii) what we might understand as at least a rough match in performance register: "The fieldworker will be seeking after contemporary speeches, prayers, songs, and narratives, looking for patterns in the wording that have analogs in the ancient text and noting the ways in which such patterns are actualized in performance" (147). At its root, ethnopaleography offers another way to revivify the text, to privilege that which textuality has rendered rhetorical by reduction of experience to object, and to do so by reawakening the voice that makes it an event.

In the same spirit of causing texts to speak, Hymes has concentrated on editing into his editions and translations a set of native poetic features that includes lines, verses, versicles, stanzas, scenes, acts, and parts. All of these interlocking features are derived from, rather than imposed upon, the works he studies, and together they comprise a rhetoric that is instrumental in their reception. What is more, Hymes views this set of features as both traditional – in their institutionalized identity as rhetorical structures – in not just one but all related performances and texts – and individually deployed – in the sense of a single author's license to create within their general purview. For example, in his analysis and presentation of Charles Cultee's "Salmon's Myth", he distinguishes between Tedlock's emphasis on pause and other intonational features on the one hand, and the kinds of performance structures in which he is interested on the other:

...Dennis Tedlock's admirable insistence on the vocal realization of texts has given rise to the impression in some quarters that pauses alone, not other kinds of markers as well, let alone interdependence of signals with content and function, are the foundation

of units in a text... But pause or any other feature of sound is *in itself* a physical, not a cultural phenomenon. It becomes an aspect of structure only in terms of the basic principle of 'practical structuralism', contrast and repetition, the use of form/ meaning covariation to establish what counts as the same and what as different. In a single case, one cannot be sure what features are accidental, what are conventional in the style of one narrator, what are conventional in the community. (Hymes 1985: 395-96, emphasis added.)

Hymes's ethnopoetics is, then, essentially an immanent poetics: strategies and categories for expression constitute aspects of a register that provides for a high degree of communicative economy within a well defined performance arena. The uniqueness of the narrator's individual realization of a given tale resonates against and within that larger cultural poetics.

With this distinction in mind, it is not difficult to see how Hymes can derive from early dictated texts an ethnopoetically faithful libretto, without necessary recourse to ethnopaleography. If performance rhetoric inheres in works of verbal art as a coherent set of signals that in their dedicated form tap into dedicated channels of meaning, then even the most prosaically configured written record of a tale can be reconfigured and made to speak. Of course it cannot be forced back into the event from which it was extruded; plain common sense must tell us that there are endemic limits on extrapolation from silence. But for Hymes some important aspects of Native American narrative poetics persist as performance modulates to text, and although the intersemiotic translation must make recovery less than complete, recognition of what amounts to a traditional rhetoric opens the now-written work to more faithful interpretation.

South Slavic Traditions into Texts

Although South Slavic oral traditions share with the Native American the temporal 'accidents' of being both living (or in some cases recently living) and much studied over the past few decades, their histories of edition and analysis vary quite dramatically. Insofar as epic narrative is concerned, the Serbian and Croatian traditions were from their first extensive collection and publication closely linked with the western European hegemony established by the Homeric poems and seconded by medieval vernacular works such as the Old French *chansons de geste* and Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*. For this and other reasons the classic texts, such as those collected, edited, and published by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić in the mid-nine-

teenth century, have always exhibited standard poetic lineation of their decasyllabic or *bugar'stica* verses, but have lacked entirely any encoding of the kind of paralinguistic or rhetorical features like those highlighted in the text-making of Tedlock and Hymes.

This leveling may have focused attention on those aspects of poetics that happened to have precedent in the western European model, but they just as certainly obscured those features that did not enjoy such precedent. The decasyllabic line, for instance, an archaic and complex metrical structure, was only too easily misinterpreted as a trochaic pentameter, with the obvious consequence of deflecting analysis from the real nature of the meter-phraseology symbiosis that informed the traditional idiom. For another example, the instrumental and vocal music that accompanied the performance of most Moslem and some Christian epic was in effect "written out" of the textual transcriptions; to date it has never received the attention it deserves as a full partner in the performance event. More generally, the native Serbian and Croatian scholarship, largely laboring under the same typically modern, unexamined predisposition that "oral tradition is usually a book and not a memory" (Parks 1990: 58), has concentrated almost exclusively on the individual artistry of the singers of tales, seeking to discover literary values in their performed narratives and downplaying (if even considering) their traditional resonances.

Karadžić, an ethnographer, linguist, and lexicographer very much ahead of his time, felt the widespread nineteenth-century European urge to lay bare his culture's roots and yet managed to introduce or refine contemporary methods of textual representation. Unlike many scholars of that period, most infamously the Grimms, he interfered little with the received transcriptions of oral performances during editing, making very few if any changes in the dictated texts. Even when he did intervene to modify, or much more rarely to add, a line or part-line, he consistently turned to patently traditional diction as the source for his emendations. Furthermore, he not seldom included multiple variants or versions of a given collected narrative, customarily by a different poet from a different geographical area, placing the two (rarely more) contiguously in the volume and labeling the subsequent version(s) "Opet to isto" ('Again the same'). In addition, Karadžić attempted to create natural settings for the poems within individual volumes of his published collection, either by genre (e.g., the "various women's songs" of volume one being separated from the "oldest heroic songs" of its sequel) or by principal characters or events (e.g., groupings centered around the beloved Serbian hero Marko Kraljević or the historically and mythically epochal Battle of Kosovo of 1389). By these latter two strategies Karadžić the editor was able to simulate something of the (extratextual) traditional con-

text, presenting alternate realizations of some songs while encouraging a reception of each poem/performance against a larger, more resonant background. To a remarkable extent, given what other contemporary investigators licensed themselves to do, he demonstrated a respect for these narratives on their own terms and tried to fashion a mode of textual presentation in which at least some of the performance rhetoric was inscribed.

The collection and publication project undertaken by Milman Parry and Albert Lord, from the 1933–35 fieldwork in then-Yugoslavia through the ongoing series *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs* (1953–), brought the pragmatics of textual representation of this tradition to a new level. In concert with the theory behind the Parry–Lord field methods, the first two volumes of *SCHS* presented multiple versions of the same tale by the same and different singers from the region of Novi Pazar. Lord described the publication plans for the series as follows:

In investigating an oral epic tradition, it is necessary to begin with a study of the songs of an individual singer and then to proceed to a consideration of the other singers in the same district. One thus sees the singer both as an individual and in relation to the community of singers to which he belongs. For that reason our selected texts will be published by districts, and within each district the songs of a single singer will be grouped together. (*SCHS* I: 16.)

By reading through the different performances of *The Captivity of Djuljić Ibrahim*, for example, one can gain some sense of the multiplicity of oral epic tradition. Although this series also has some drawbacks (run-on prose translations, concentration on textual aspects of performance, and so on), it does offer the reader a chance to escape many of the drawbacks of editions that epitomize individual versions at the expense of context.

Ancient and Medieval Traditional Texts

In moving on to ancient and medieval texts that constitute our only entrée to long-extinct oral traditions, with respect to which the complexities associated with the persistence of traditional forms only multiply, it may be well to recall the central goal of this chapter – to ascertain as well as possible *how a given text continues the tradition of reception*. In those simplest of situations where, as is often the case with living traditions, we are confronting a transcription of an oral performance, the question, though demanding, is clear: to what extent does the text contribute meaningfully to the faithful recon-

strual of the experience, with all of the implications inherent in an understanding of the work as a performed event? We have considered the opinions and strategies offered by Tedlock and by Hymes for Native American, and by Karadžić and by Parry and Lord for South Slavic, and have noted both advantages and shortcomings in each approach to representation of oral tradition in the textualized format. But now we must consider texts about whose genesis we may know very little. What is more, for ancient and medieval texts we must acknowledge the strong possibility or probability that writing may have been employed at any or all levels of their composition or transmission or both, so that the relatively simpler problem of transcriptions made according to incompletely understood rules and assumptions will not be the only complication. For such transitional documents, passed down through an unrecorded series of rewritings, the picture of compositional identity becomes very murky indeed. Elaborate hypotheses painstakingly formulated to explain the probable act or acts of composition may founder if pressed to account for even this or that small alternative in the chain of composition and transmission.

Among the pitfalls awaiting the classicist or medievalist will be the potentially quite misleading matter of whether or not writing was "available" to the poets and audiences of the so-called Dark Ages of Greece and England. As folklorists have long known, the mere presence of some kind or level of literacy, established perhaps by an inscription on an artifact, means next to nothing as evidence for or against oral or written communication in a given mode or situation. Late twentieth-century people from all over the globe, many of them deeply engaged in intensely literate pursuits for most of their waking hours, also participate in oral traditions that may never have been textualized. In terms developed earlier, we will need to keep firmly in mind the fact that verbal activities involve registers of discourse that may or may not be immediately or eventually textualized, according to the demands of the codicils to the sociolinguistic contract in force in a given culture. The past decade has seen awareness of the importance of social function emerge among classicists and medievalists as well, with scholars like William V. Harris (1989) and Rosalind Thomas (1989) offering realistically complex views of the various uses of oral and written media in the ancient world, and with Franz H. Bäuml (1980, 1984–85), A. N. Doane (1994), and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (1990), among others, productively complicating our perspective on the false dichotomy of medieval orality and literacy.

For such reasons it seems best to stipulate that our understanding of the "original composition" of the Homeric epics and *Beowulf* – if indeed that phrase is strictly applicable – is likely to remain uncer-

tain, and to focus instead on what can be inferred about the reception of these works from the persistence of traditional forms as a textual rhetoric. This emphasis entails a reversal of the usual heuristic perspective: instead of trying to gauge how much has been preserved or lost, we need rather to ask what the documents can tell us about how they should be read. Our authority for posing the analytical query in this way rests on the evidence for a prior (and perhaps ongoing) oral tradition accompanying the generation of texts, on comparative evidence from other oral traditions, and not least on the principle of what I have elsewhere called "immanent art."

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A. B. Lord's Concept of Transitional Texts in Relation to the Homeric Epics

MINNA SKAFTE JENSEN

It is one of the paradoxes in the study of literature that the oral formulaic theory was developed on the basis of a written text. The manner of composition of the two ancient Greek epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, has been disputed since antiquity, and the only certain fact is that they were transmitted to us in written form. Not only were Parry's investigations into the noun-epithet-formulas of the two poems concerned with the written texts, as all Homeric studies must of course be, but his own approach was very bookish, even pedantic, and his studies could not have been carried out on the basis of orally performed Homeric epics, had such a possibility existed. Parry was carefully counting and doing statistics of words and phrases in the printed volumes of the Homeric poems, and his famous definition of the formula was framed so as to describe the result of his scrutiny of the diction of the written *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Even so, his French thesis, *L'épithète traditionnelle dans Homère* (1928) became the cornerstone upon which the oral theory was built.

During the years following his thesis, he and his pupil did their fieldwork in Yugoslavia, and the results were published both in various papers by Milman Parry and – most influentially – in A. B. Lord's *The Singer of Tales* (1960). This book not only revolutionized Homeric scholarship, it also made a deep impact on anthropological and folkloristic studies, and the wording of the theme for this panel on "Oral and Semiliterary Epics" reveals that questions raised there are still with us.

In chapter VI of his book Lord discussed the relationship between writing and oral tradition (124–38). Here he stated, among other things, that any given literary text is either oral or written and cannot be transitional between the two media. Phases of transition exist, but transitional texts do not: "because the two techniques are, I submit, contradictory and mutually exclusive" (Lord 1960: 129). This was met with strong criticism, a fact I have discussed on an earlier occasion (Jensen 1980: 22–26, 89–92). With an open-mindedness rare among scholars Lord accepted much of the criticism and changed his

views, as demonstrated in quite a few of his later works (1974, 1978, 1986 a, b and c; cf. Foley 1988). However, in a way I think that he was more correct in his initial stand than in his later retraction.

The disagreement about transitional texts

Even though the oral theory was eagerly discussed in Homeric studies, most scholars soon made up their minds on the main question of orality versus literacy so that they considered the forerunners of the Iliad and the Odyssey to have been orally composed, but the two transmitted poems to have been composed in writing or to have drawn on writing in some way or other – in short, to be transitional texts. However, since the theory was based on Homer in the first place, and since the ancient sources do not permit definite answers, the criticism raised by scholars other than Homerists seems more important in the present context. I shall briefly survey the discussion by taking into account the ideas of two of Lord's most intelligent critics, Michael Curschmann and Ruth Finnegan. Curschmann based his criticism on medieval texts, whereas Finnegan argued on the basis of her own fieldwork in Sierra Leone as well as of a broad knowledge of oral poetry in the modern world. Both are authorities in their respective fields, and their rejection of Lord's dictum has no doubt carried great weight even among Homerists.

Curschmann in his "Oral Poetry in Mediaeval English, French, and German Literature: Some Notes on Recent Research" (1979 [1967]) surveyed the influence of the oral theory on the study of medieval literature and was clearly interested in the inspiration such a comparative approach might offer. However, he kept aloof from the more radical aspects of the theory. Towards the end of his paper, he discusses how far Parry and Lord's observations can be applied to medieval poetry and doubts the general validity of many of their results. Thus, when he considers how the writing of the various medieval poems can have actually taken place, he maintains that "of all of Parry's and Lord's observations this is the one most difficult to generalise: that the Yugoslavian singers find it difficult either to recite slowly enough for someone to follow in long-hand or (if they are literate) to write their songs down themselves". Also, "for the finished product to be strictly oral, the singer would have had to possess the modern scholar's awareness of an absolute difference between written and oral". He draws attention to texts that are demonstrably relying on written learning, while at the same time being characterized by formulas, themes, and adding style, and he declares the *Chanson de Roland* to be the "prototype of a transitional text. In its carefully balanced, tripartite structure it is clearly distinguished

from the other *chansons*. At the same time it retains the formulaic character of oral composition and performance". His conclusion is that transitional texts not only exist, but are typical of transmitted medieval poetry, since the attitudes of oral formulaic composition let themselves be carried over without problems into written composition. (Curschmann 1979 [1967]: 478–80.)

Ruth Finnegan's criticism was that the oral theory is too rigid in its definitions and runs a risk of separating what really belongs together. Her well-informed and readable paper, "What is Oral Literature Anyway? Comments in the Light of Some African and Other Comparative Material" (1976), acknowledges the general importance of Parry and Lord's work, but it is mainly an attack on certain assumptions which she rejects on the basis of fieldwork. The question of transitional texts is one of these assumptions. Finnegan demonstrates that written and oral literature have coexisted in many cultures, often with a lively interchange between the two (1976: 137–38, 140–41). She mentions oral poets who rely on brief written notes for their performance, and from her own experience she adduces as an example that of the two most brilliant storytellers she attended in Sierra Leone, one was illiterate while the other had one of the best educations attainable in his community.

In her book, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (1977), she refrains from defining the term "oral", since she feels that it covers too many fields to be definable; texts can be oral in at least three important ways, referring to their composition, transmission and performance, and there is a wealth of mixed forms in between.

The basic point then, is the continuity of 'oral' and 'written' literature. There is no deep gulf between the two: they shade into each other both in the present and over many centuries of historical development, and there are innumerable cases of poetry which has both 'oral' and 'written' elements. The idea of pure and uncontaminated 'oral culture' as the primary reference point for the discussion of oral poetry is a myth. (Finnegan 1977: 24.)

Both in this book and in her Penguin anthology of oral poetry (1978) she includes a rich and varied selection from many times and parts of the world. One of the important aspects is that she makes it abundantly clear that "oral poetry" has an infinite range of genres – Lord sometimes gives his reader the feeling that it is necessarily epic.

As I have tried to show, Curschmann and Finnegan are opposite poles in their criticism, even though they both attack the idea that transitional texts are an impossibility.

But, were they really answering what Lord had said in the first

place? He was not saying that no oral poet could read and write, nor that there was no coexistence and mutual inspiration between oral and written literature. On the contrary, he discusses many aspects of this, such as what happens when oral poets write their own texts, or when singers learn their texts from books; he also describes how school teaching, diffusion of song books, or campaigns against illiteracy influence traditions. After all, his own fieldwork was carried out in an area where written and oral literature manifestly coexisted. One of Finnegan's assertions, that Lord claims that literacy inevitably destroys the capacity of the oral composer (Finnegan 1976: 138) is actually quoted from G. S. Kirk, not from Lord (137). In the discussion after reading his paper Lord said little, but did briefly defend himself against misrepresentation (175).

Finnegan was, however, herself deeply immersed in a study of oral poetry, and her critical remarks must be read with this in mind: she disputed the theory from inside, as one who was working in the field and therefore took a vivid interest in having clear and useful concepts and a well-defined terminology. Curschmann, on the other side, was only moderately willing to accept the comparative framework Parry and Lord offered, even though he saw the chance of a new stimulus for medieval studies. Especially, the passage quoted about the singer having to know the difference between written and oral in order to keep it is a direct misunderstanding – the theory maintains that such factors operate unconsciously. Furthermore, to think that what Parry and Lord called "adding style" excludes overall composition of the type described for the *Chanson de Roland* is an incorrect deduction. The adding style is concerned with the linking of verses: in Homer, each hexameter verse tends to be a rounded whole, and when a verse is finished the period is – or seems to be – finished as well; often, however, it turns out that the following verse adds new elements through what Parry called "unperiodic enjambement". He and Lord saw this as closely connected with the demands of performance: the singer needs a break to draw breath, and the audience needs the feeling that at each break something meaningful has been presented. This does not mean that the story-line necessarily has to be additive. On the contrary, ring-composition and not least tripartite structures seem to be very widespread in oral literature, so much so that they should perhaps be considered typical elements of oral style. If you enter a story a-b-c, you have to pass c-b-a to get out again (Olrik 1992 [1921]). And the reactions of Parry and Lord's informants to the process of dictation has been largely borne out by fieldwork and is clearly a general phenomenon. Similar problems were actually described by the Danish folklorist Evald Tang Kristensen on the basis of his fieldwork during the last decades of the nineteenth century (discussed in Holbek 1987: 69–85).

Lord was not, of course, free from a certain romantic admiration for anything oral, almost to the point of regretting the success of campaigns for literacy, and he often overstated his points. Finnegan has some very pertinent remarks about misdirected ideas of an "oral mentality" and even about a return to an old-fashioned, naivistic anthropology that professional anthropologists no longer embrace. However, to my mind, this is both understandable and excusable considering that Lord was introducing a new kind of scholarship and wanted to argue his points as forcefully as possible. In general, his discussion is careful, many-faceted, and expressive of a clear eye for what is characteristic of the oral poetry he had been studying. Considering that, after all, he wrote on the basis of a relatively limited material – Homer and South Slavic epic – it is impressive how much has been confirmed by later fieldwork.

This is especially the case for the most central ideas, that oral narrative is flexible, that each performance is to a certain degree a composition, that the poet is in a tension between the story he/she is performing and other similar stories, and that this causes narrative inconsistencies. In addition, the observation that singers and audiences feel no need to have their traditions recorded in writing and that consequently the initiative to have texts written down is taken by persons with some other purpose in mind has been widely confirmed by further anthropological and folkloristic research. The mere fact that the distinction between oral and written is still felt to make sense is a sign that even though each of these terms covers a broad field and must be further defined for many practical purposes, they are still basic.

What is meant by "transitional"?

The disagreement about the possibility of transitional texts may seem of minor importance. What, in my view, makes Lord's original standpoint worthy of serious consideration is exactly that it is so surprising. If he was well acquainted with examples of the kind that Curschmann mentions, and if such texts are not transitional, what then did he mean by the term? His opinion is what classical philologists when studying medieval manuscripts would call the *lectio difficilior*, a reading that by its very strangeness deserves attention, since it is not easily explained as a slip of the tongue, or of the hand. Thus it is its very incongruity that makes me think that Lord's statement was built on some kind of genuine experience, even though he later retracted his stand.

There seem to be two rather different components in Lord's view. Besides the above-mentioned consideration of the mutually exclusive

techniques of composition, there is, I think, an astonishment at certain features encountered during his and Parry's fieldwork in Yugoslavia. If they went there with the usual ready-made idea of development in their minds, according to which writing is a self-evident progress from orality, they must have been surprised when they found that their informants did not eagerly grasp the art of writing. Illiterate epic singers often expressed admiration of books and those that could read them and believed that if they had known how to read and write, they would have been better at their profession. But those who were actually literate did not sit down to write their poems. On the contrary, they continued as they had been taught, not even writing down the main points of their story as a mnemonic aid or using the art of writing in other ways to stimulate their craft. They preferred their traditional procedure. When Lord denied the existence of transitional texts, he was, I think, still under the feeling of surprise that the Slavic oral tradition had coexisted with literacy for so many centuries, and that writing seemed not to be a stimulus for the oral epic singer.

The term "transitional" suggests an evolution from oral to written, and that has, of course, been a typical pattern in history. However, it may also convey the idea that this evolution is necessarily from worse to better. In the modern world criticism of civilization and nostalgia for more primitive stages are common phenomena; nevertheless it almost always goes without saying that writing, and especially alphabetic writing, is an advance. The advantages of literacy have often been described, whereas it is much rarer to read considerations concerning the advantages of oral performance. But the studies of M. T. Clanchy (1993 [1979]) and Brian Street (1984) of oral and written communication in medieval England and modern Iran have added important shades to the picture, and in a brilliant and thought-provoking book Rosalind Thomas (1989) has discussed the various functions of oral and written forms in classical Athens, c. 500–300 B.C. She stresses the plurality of ways in which writing and oral tradition mingled and the slowness with which writing was gradually accepted as a trustworthy medium.

A transitional text can be imagined in two main forms: an oral performance by a literate poet who uses both oral and written techniques in his/her art, or a written composition by an oral poet who writes poetry instead of performing orally. The first type is in a way well-known in modern societies, where theatrical performances and many other oral art-forms are normally composed in writing. Such texts are, however, better described in Finnegan's terminology as examples of oral performance combined with written composition and transmission, and they are not the kind of texts this debate is concerned with. It is, however, an interesting fact that in societies that are still

mainly oral, performances of the first type do not, as far as I know, occur. The other type is attested, and I shall discuss some examples shortly.

The idea of the term "transitional" as a description of a work of poetry or prose is that this is an interim form between two phases of development, a work composed with access to both oral tradition and art of writing. The fact that the poetry of the Old English poet Cynewulf (c. 800 A.D.) has formulas and acrostichs side by side seems to reflect that it was composed in a process in which orality and literacy worked together. And especially, writing is expected to add sophistication to oral art, considered to be simpler, and this is how it is regarded in Homeric scholarship: it is thought that Homer had the best of two worlds and based his art on an ancient oral tradition while at the same time exploiting the advantages offered by the technique of writing. But the problem is that we shall never know for sure how such poetry transmitted to us from medieval or ancient times was composed, and therefore these texts cannot be used as arguments in the debate.

It is necessary instead to look at texts which are composed under better known circumstances. As far as I know, Lord's experience that oral epic singers in Yugoslavia who knew how to write did not use writing as a help in their composition has not been contradicted by modern fieldwork. That Finnegan had to refer to a medieval Chinese example of the use of written summaries as a mnemonic aid (Finnegan 1976: 140) seems to reveal that she had been unable to find demonstrably oral cases. We can assume that if her Limba storytellers had found such a practice useful, she would have mentioned them instead.

So let us consider other possible candidates for transitional texts. First, one of Lord's own examples. In one of his last papers, "The Merging of Two Worlds: Oral and Written Poetry as Carriers of Ancient Values", he describes the Montenegrin poet Petar Petrovic Njegos, *vladika* 'prince and bishop' of Montenegro in the middle of the nineteenth century. Born in 1813 Njegos grew up in an oral environment, and as a child he probably learned to compose traditional oral epic. At the age of twelve he entered the monastery of Cetinje where he was taught to read and write, and here he also started his career as a written poet, composing in the traditional ten-syllable verse of the Serbian oral epic. Five of his poems were published in 1835, and Lord finds that one of these is of special interest as a "merger", since it uses formulas and themes side by side with "non-traditional elements". Lord concludes that this poem is "truly transitional in the development of Njegos's own writing as in the Montenegrin tradition itself" (Lord 1986b: 32-33). Earlier in his life, however, Lord would probably have characterized such a poem as a written composition influenced by oral tradition and considered the poet

to have passed from one "world" into another.

A somewhat similar example from the same period is the Finnish scholar and poet Elias Lönnrot. In his composition of the *Kalevala* on the basis of folk poetry he had himself collected, he was influenced by Homeric scholarship of his day and tried to do for Finnish oral traditions what he thought Homer had done for ancient Greek epic (Honko 1990). But already for this reason his great poem is manifestly a work of written erudition: it not only presupposes acquaintance with Greek scholarship, but would be unthinkable without the general impact of the Romantic movement, the rise of national awareness, the interest in preserving old traditions perhaps threatened by extinction, etc.

A very different case to be considered is presented by Kirsten Thisted (1994) in her study of Eskimo stories from Greenland. Christian missionaries of the eighteenth century were very efficient at teaching the Greenlanders to read and write, and the early collections of Eskimo stories consist mainly of texts that the storytellers themselves wrote and handed on to the collectors. The narrators seem to have written the stories that they used to tell while at the same time having a reader rather than an audience in mind. However, the texts must in many ways be different from oral performance. The narrators no doubt purged their stories of such elements that might be frowned upon by the collector – the local (Danish) minister, schoolmaster, or colonial administrator. This will typically have been the case regarding heathen aspects of the stories or elements that might be expected to offend the collectors' sexual norms. Furthermore, passages for some reason considered difficult to understand for the foreigner will have been explained or left out. Kirsten Thisted even finds that whereas the earliest texts exhibit influences from European literature, such elements disappear in later texts, and she interprets this – convincingly, it seems to me – as an expression of the collectors' wish to have only pure old Greenlandic texts. We cannot know if the storytellers also felt inspired by the art of writing to develop their texts into something more like written literature. I find it more probable that they shortened their stories because of the slow process of writing, but admit that our sources do not allow us to decide. However, it seems certain that none of the storytellers would have thought of recording their stories in writing for their own use.

Parts of the genesis of the Greenlandic collections are unusually well described: it is generally known what the collectors asked for, and the narrators often begin with some lines of comment on what they are sending them. By studying the collectors' archives in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, Kirsten Thisted has been able to follow in detail what happened to the texts between the "original", i.e., the first written version, and the printed text. Her results are il-

luminating: in their wish to make the stories appeal to the taste of the reading public the editors have altered them in many ways.

Thus, even if we tend to find Lord's opinion, that the two techniques are contradictory and mutually exclusive, to be an overstatement, it still seems to describe a difference between the two that was sufficiently felt to make people react to it long before an oral theory had been formulated. It is a well-known fact that older editions of "folk poetry" are not very careful to offer authentic texts; repetitions and other characteristics of the oral style are reduced and morally offensive passages pruned. Again, Kirsten Thisted has some very interesting points in her analysis of the kind of editorial work the Eskimo texts were subjected to: the Danish collectors H. J. Rink (1819-93), Knud Rasmussen (1879-1933), and others wanted to attract Danish readers and make them accept that the Greenlandic Eskimos had a literature worthy of respect, and in order not to repel their readers they edited both content and style of the stories, often rather heavily.

These three examples, the works of Petar Njegos, Elias Lönnrot, and the writing Eskimos, all belong to the second type described above. The Greenlandic stories obviously come closest to what scholars have in mind when thinking of transitional texts: they are composed by traditional artists who presumably try to record their oral performance in writing. There is another sense in which it might be argued that these texts are transitional, inasmuch as they form an interim stage in the history of Greenlandic literature; for modern writers seeking coherence in their national literature, such stories represent the oldest known stage and mark the bridge to the otherwise lost oral tradition. However, so many other influences have played a role in this process that there is no simple linear development from oral narrative to written novel or short story.

And in any case, such "transitional" texts are very far from what Homeric scholars have in mind, when they imagine that Homer combined the traditional oral epic singer's professional art with the literate intellectual's sophistication and taste for grandiose compositional effects. To elucidate this question only fieldwork will do, and Homeric scholarship is totally dependent on the care with which fieldworkers describe their procedures. It is a regrettable fact that they are usually far too modest when it comes to describing their own part of the job. We who wish to learn from them often look in vain for information about the collector's aims, what he/she asked the singer for, what took place during performance, and what editorial work has been done afterwards. For my own part I am especially eager to learn about the process of dictation since that must be the way in which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were recorded in writing, if they are to be considered orally composed. As a matter of fact, I know of

only one edition which is really explicit about the collector's part: Susan Slyomovics's brilliant edition of an Egyptian Hilali epic (Slyomovics 1987).

The politics of oral and written composition

Does it matter at all whether texts can be transitional or not? Is it not merely an empty dispute about words whether Cynewulf's poems should be described as transitional or composed in writing on the basis of oral tradition? It can be argued that it is of little consequence for the study of oral, literary or semi-literary epics of modern times. The interaction of oral and written, or of folk traditions and the literature of the educated classes is studied anyway and has already been brilliantly described by Pjotr Bogatyrev and Roman Jakobson (1966 [1929]). When they described folklore as "eine besondere Form des Schaffens", this did not mean that they rejected any kind of mutual influence between written and oral literature, but they nevertheless emphasized the difference between the two, not only in the way the poets worked but also in the status of the audiences.

On the other hand, the question is important in the interpretation of ancient and medieval texts because it is decisive of where to look for analogies. If we want to fit the Iliad and the Odyssey into some kind of general epic form, should we look to literate poets such as Milton and Ariosto, or rather to oral epic traditions of our own times?

What Homeric scholarship seeks in modern fieldwork is above all a framework. We need suitable models for reconstructing the lost social contexts of the poems as well as for developing a kind of aesthetic criticism that is not inherently anachronistic. The Iliad and the Odyssey have been transmitted without any indication of their background except what we can read out of the texts themselves. Ancient Greek intellectuals from Herodotus onwards discussed Homer's identity and times and had to rely on speculations more or less of the same kind as those that surround the poet today. Often the twentieth century scholar tacitly implies that the ancient poet worked more or less in the same way as his modern counterpart. After all, he was a genius and as such not restricted by conventions of time and culture. Those of us who are critical of this fallacy turn to modern fieldwork in order to find a model that can replace the anachronistic Western assumptions, when we try to reconstruct how these old poems came into being.

This was in Lord's mind, too, when he insisted on excluding the possibility of regarding the Iliad and the Odyssey as transitional texts. What was on the face of it a discussion of literary techniques was perhaps in a deeper sense a political discussion. Lord wrote:

"Diplomatic Homerists would like to find refuge in a transitional poet who is both an oral poet – they cannot disprove the evidence of his style – and a written poet – they cannot, on the other hand, tolerate the unwashed illiterate" (Lord 1960: 128–29). It is seldom expressed directly, but the unwillingness to accept a comparison between Homer and oral singers of the backward parts of Western culture or of the so-called Third World runs as an undercurrent in much Homeric scholarship.

Often political connotations are more clearly apparent when looked at from a distance. When we now read what was written of Homer during the period of the two world wars, it can be shocking to see how the British-German conflict of the modern world mixed itself up with the study of antiquity; the discussions sometimes give the feeling of political propaganda rather than scholarship. Thus T. W. Allen, the distinguished editor of the Oxford text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, found that he could discard the German analytical theory altogether by maintaining that Germans did not even understand their own contemporaries, and he stated in his *Homer, the Origins and the Transmission* that German scholarship would offer future psychiatrists interesting data for study (Allen 1924: 6). If now there is a controversy over the comparability of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* on one hand and Indian or African epic on the other, it seems to be in some way related to the abolition of open colonialism during the second half of our century. When discussing Homer, some people feel that to compare him with illiterate singers of our times comes close to blasphemy – after all, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the crown of ancient Greek poetry and as such almost emblematic for the European mind.

I think Lord's view in this matter was mainly aimed at Homeric scholars. At least, in the passage just referred to he is explicit that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* not only are not transitional, but that they cannot even belong to a transitional *period* of written style. And he briefly refers to one of the leading Homeric scholars of the day: "Bowra's phrase that the richness of these poems 'suggests reliance on writing' is ambiguous" (Lord 1960: 134).

Nevertheless the idea that the greatness of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was in some way due to the art of writing has proved long-lived in Homeric scholarship and has had many adherents. A typical argument in books about the Homeric question is (heavily simplified): the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are sophisticated poems and consequently they cannot have been orally composed. During the decades immediately following Lord's book it was mainly the overall composition that drew the attention of scholars, and the demonstration of the elegance of composition regularly formed the basis of such an argumentation. An example of this is Rismag Gordesiani's study, *Kri-*

terien der Schriftlichkeit und Mündlichkeit im homerischen Epos (1986), which is much more a book about the wonders of composition in the two poems than about orality and literacy.

The feeling that the poet must somehow have worked in a way recognizable for us is rather dominant among Homerists. In an otherwise impressive analysis of Iliadic composition Dieter Lohmann imagines (1970) that the poet had before him some kind of card index in order to check up on his many cross-references; even though I cannot make this fit into anything known about ancient Greek working practices, I find the suggestion important since it is at least a serious attempt at explaining how the poet managed to keep hold of his complicated story. To J. Th. Kakridis (1972) the working methods of folklorists offered the model: he thought that the fairy tales and other folk genres that we suspect behind the Homeric poems were handled by professional singers, who maintained oral catalogues as a kind of archive, on the basis of which they systematized and elaborated the simpler stories into the monumental poems. G. P. Goold presents a strange picture of a poet who had before him a "wall of unlimited length", on which he inscribed the Iliad and the Odyssey, changing his mind in the process, scratching out errors and squeezing in extra lines (Goold 1977: 17). Pietro Pucci's (1987) Homer is almost postmodernist in his self-quotations, whereas Scott Richardson (1990) returns to classical unitarianism; and neither of the two last-mentioned considers how this could plausibly have taken place in archaic Greece. Alexander Kleinlogel (1981) argues that Homer was really a philologist rather than a poet – here I feel tempted to quote Lord who wrote in connection with similar opinions (1960: 128): "There is even the possibility that Homer would not feel complimented!"

Some of Lord's critics concluded that not only were the Iliad and the Odyssey composed in writing, but actually the art of writing was in some mysterious way the key to the understanding of the Homeric miracle. "What the poet needed (and what the Muse gave him) was an alphabet", was Wade-Gery's proposal (1952: 14). And Milman Parry's son, the tremendously influential Adam Parry, found an especially elegant expression of the idea, when he spoke of "the epoch-making (epic-making?) act of putting such long poems into writing" (1966: 185). Even the greatest authority on early Greek inscriptions, Lilian Jeffery, was of the opinion that the Iliad and the Odyssey had been written very soon after the introduction of the alphabet, and that their greatness was in some way directly dependent on this (1961, 1976).

From orality to literacy in ancient Greece

The idea that the alphabet was even introduced with the purpose of writing poetry has recently been brought forward again by Barry Powell in his ambitious book *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet* (1991). Here he carefully reconsiders the whole question of when and how the Greek alphabet was formed and surveys the various early inscriptions. He argues that even though they pop up over most of the Greek world in rather differing letter forms almost simultaneously c. 750–700 B.C., the adaptation of the Phoenician consonantal writing system into the Greek alphabet was one man's achievement and not a gradual development. His arguments for this are convincing and in agreement with the consensus just now – a fact that is in itself slightly disconcerting, since it fits perhaps too well into the general trend these years to find gifted individuals everywhere, rather than collective efforts and historical development. Powell dates the "adapter" to c. 800 B.C. (1991: 20).

Powell proceeds to discuss the dating of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and when he concludes that the greatest intellectual achievements of early Greece – the making of the alphabet and the composition of these two poems – were simultaneous, c. 800 B.C., he connects them with each other. On the other hand, he accepts Lord's statement that oral epic singers feel no need of writing as a means to secure the preservation of their poems, since they are already convinced that they are transmitting their tradition in the best possible way. Therefore he ends up with a model in which Homer and the ingenious adapter of the Greek alphabet meet, and the latter, who is not only aware of the possibilities inherent in the new art, but has even given the alphabet a form especially suited to the writing of hexameters, records Homer's poems in writing.

To my mind, Powell's hypothesis does not make sense in a comparative setting. It is too dependent on developmental prejudice to convince. Powell's way of thinking is clearly determined by his feeling that whatever took place in early Greece was a movement forwards. More important, in his search for geniuses he writes as if history had in some way the aim of producing the two Homeric epics we know; he sees these two particular texts as single achievements, not as parts of an epic tradition. This is a fault that he has in common with many Homeric scholars: they tend to think what we have is what had to be. An often encountered metaphor, that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were "crystallized out" of the epic oral tradition, seems to indicate that rhapsodes were all the time striving to refine their art until they achieved their goal – the two poems we know. But why should they have done this? What would have been the point? Some scholars even think that when the great poet had composed his

monumental poems, everyone accepted that they were something extraordinary and took care to transmit them unaltered in their memories until the development of writing had made fixation possible.

One of the virtues of Powell's book is that he carefully relates Greek writing to the systems that preceded it. He also provides a detailed and readable discussion of the early inscriptions, which is in itself a major achievement. In this context he draws up an interesting list of categories covering not only the surviving inscriptions but also those that might have been expected but are not found; the texts are private, while there is nothing public or economic (1991: 182). However, in his declared aim not only to describe what took place but also to discuss why, he does, I think, jump too quickly to his conclusions. He takes for granted that the purpose of writing was to give fixed form to oral and therefore fluid messages, and the fact that many of them are in hexameter verse is an important element in his argumentation.

The whole question of the invention of the Greek alphabet and the spread of literacy has been a central discussion in recent years and has been competently treated by Rosalind Thomas (1989, 1992). In her first book she is concerned with Athens, the summit of Greek literacy, during its heyday in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., and with all sides of written and oral communication, not just literature. The picture she paints is of a differentiated situation with no clear and simple development from orality to literacy – various social groups expressed themselves in writing or orally under different conditions, in different situations for different functions, and habits changed considerably during the two centuries. Thus Greek "literacy" is at least as multiform as "orality". She has many examples of people continuing old practices in circumstances in which we might have expected them to prefer writing, or considering writing with mistrust compared to oral communication, and this takes place in a period when the art had been widespread and well-known for centuries. In her second book she treats all important aspects of literacy and orality for the whole period of Greek history from the earliest inscriptions down to the Roman Empire, and many new insights emerge.

Jesper Svenbro is another writer who has looked at the oldest Greek inscriptions with a fresh look. In his *Phrasikleia: Anthropologie de la lecture en Grèce ancienne* (1988) he attaches much weight to the fact that early Greek funeral inscriptions are invariably in the first person: the monument itself speaks by way of its inscription. Combined with the fact that ancient reading was spoken aloud, this means that the inscription in its demand to be read exploits the voice of the reader – the process is described by Svenbro as an act of violence. Furthermore, he compares the relationship be-

tween writer and reader to that between lover and beloved in the Greek system of male homosexuality.

In an interesting article, Egbert J. Bakker (1993) discusses text and performance in early Greece as a question of activation and reenactment rather than communication, and he considers writing to be an act of fixation of what is already known by the reader.

Among the various hypotheses about the function of writing in early Greece, even those that apply new methods to the material, the idea of fixation has in general been rather prominent. What if this is totally misdirected? In a way, I think we should consider letting go of the idea altogether. Even though the result of writing presents itself to us as a fixation of previously fluid texts, it does not follow that this was the purpose of those who decided to have something written. If oral traditions are in no need of writing, this means both that people are satisfied with the kind of literature they know, and that they are unaware of the flexibility so much discussed by scholars. So let us consider what other possibilities the art of writing offered the ancient Greeks.

It seems to me that a dominant aspect of early Greek inscriptions is that they are used for making clear who does what. Regularly, their effect is to make an object speak – as underlined by Svenbro in the case of funeral inscriptions. A vase is inscribed with a graffito to let it declare to whom it belongs or by whom it is given to whom for what reason. What was before an anonymous, silent vessel is by the inscription given speech and connected with a definite person. As writing becomes more and more widespread, names are added to illustrations of mythical scenes; in this way a picture of two soldiers in combat, for instance, changes from a general representation of a well-known situation on the battlefield to a specific fight between two known warriors. Names are also given to potters, painters, owners, or persons the writer wanted to celebrate.

From this point of view, the early inscriptions seem to indicate that writing was used not to fix what was otherwise fluid, but to let previously silent objects speak, and to individualize what was in itself general – a vessel, a statue, a picture, a monument to a dead person. There was no immediate need to fix memorable events, since the oral traditions took care of that already: the access to eternity was through song and storytelling. Various poetic forms were in charge of the different stages of fame: memorable men or women had their reputation stated in praise poetry, while they were alive, in laments at their funerals, and in epic song in later generations. Writing was no substitution for that, but by means of letters it became possible to have material objects speak as an addition to song and storytelling. Thus, in the early Greek alphabetic inscriptions, the art of writing functions as a means not to supply orality with qualities that it is

lacking, but to spread orality to otherwise mute objects. I understand the fact that many of these inscriptions are in hexameters as part of this function: in oral performance hexameter poetry is an authoritative way of communicating, and thus the verse-form lends the authority of oral performance to the written message.

The introduction of the alphabet into Greece is without any direct parallel in our world. The connotations of literacy and illiteracy were not the same then as they are now. The very terms reveal that in the modern world illiteracy is considered a lack of literacy, and that cannot have been the case when the Greek alphabet was made. In our days, when writing is introduced into traditional societies it is part of a much greater complex, and those who learn the writing system are at the same time introduced to other cultural factors – a certain religion, political system, way of living, etc. When the ancient Greeks learned how to write, they adapted the Semitic art of writing into something importantly different, and however new the alphabet was, it cannot have been felt as a foreign cultural factor imposed upon their tradition. (Goody & Watt 1968.) The alphabet was not part of a much greater complex of literacy – book production, reading public, etc. If anything, this is an argument that the “oral mentality” was not immediately conquered by a literate insight into the unreliability of oral traditions.

Some scholars have thought that the advantages of literacy as a means of preserving information would have been quickly recognized by the Greeks since they are in general considered to have been exceptionally intelligent, but it is interesting that direct commentaries on the introduction of writing in the surviving Greek texts tend to consider the art of writing a loss of culture. Goody and Watt have drawn attention to Plato's criticism of writing in *Phaedrus* (1968: 49–55). For my part, I especially enjoy a passage in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (458 B.C.), in which the frailty of human pursuits is illustrated with a comparison to written letters, easily wiped out with a humid sponge (vv. 1328–30). Here the art of writing is even used to symbolize transitoriness.

Individual vs. traditional composition

The quality of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* most often used as an argument for the role of writing in their process of genesis is their overall composition, already admired by Aristotle. Since most early inscriptions are too short to offer comparison in this respect, let us briefly consider the two transmitted works that come closest to them in aim, literary form, and volume, namely the prose histories by Herodotus and Thucydides, composed c. 450–430 and c. 425–400 B.C. respective-

ly. Thucydides seems to have been the first Greek author to have "understood" the potentialities of writing in the sense that has in modern times often been claimed for the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; when he says in his introduction that his work will be a "possession for eternity", he maintains the precision and stability of writing as against oral tradition (Gentili & Cerri 1975).

Neither of these two works contains an overall composition that can be compared with that of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Herodotus perhaps comes closest, since he wishes to demonstrate the moral that even the greatest powers can be overturned, as happened to the Persian Empire when it was defeated by the small Greek city states. In the first half of his work, in which he builds up the historical, geographical, and cultural background to the Persian wars, he allows himself all kinds of digressions. The same holds true for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but Herodotus leaves his main story for much longer stretches of text than the poet does. When he comes to the Persian invasion, however, he proceeds in stricter chronological fashion, and that is the structural principle of Thucydides's work.

There is no doubt that these great histories were composed in writing; the two authors probably worked in a way that we know was normal later in the Greco-Roman world, i.e., they had one or more slaves to do the actual writing, while they dictated. They could ask the slave to go back to earlier parts of the work; they could change their minds, revise what they had written, etc. Thus even if these works might be called "oral dictated texts", they are far from what Lord was thinking of, when he coined that term. They are not manifestations of an oral tradition, but individual and individualistic works. Both authors draw widely on oral sources, but they are explicitly individualistic in their approach to what they transmit. Herodotus may say, "This is the opinion of the Spartans, but the Athenians say something different, and my own judgment is..." When Herodotus and Thucydides discuss their sources and offer their reasons for why they think the events happened in one way rather than in another, they let their audiences participate in their critical reflections.

It would be inconceivable to have such passages in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. The poet's authority is of another kind: he knows what is true, he has his information straight from the Muse, and the audience is at his mercy. If he chooses to lie to them, they will be unable to check up on him. Historical truth is as important to the poet as it is to our two historians, but he handles the matter in a way completely different from theirs. The difference is one of genre, of course; but it is mainly, I think, one between an oral, traditional singer and written authors. The singer's profession forbade him to accept that there might be doubt as to the truthfulness of his tradition, that it

might even be impossible ever to ascertain the facts of a historical event. His guarantee is the Muse, and his authority accepts no criticism.¹

The poet was part of a tradition, and he composed/recomposed in a tension between his wishes to preserve historical truth correctly, as he had been taught, and to please any given audience with the version of truth they would find most convincing. The prose historian was without the help the epic tradition gives the poet, and also without its restraints. Being in private during the composition of his work, he may or may not have had special readers in mind, and he decided on the trustworthiness of his sources according to his own critical judgment. The poet was a rhapsode and had a profession with a certain status, but much lower placed in society than Herodotus and Thucydides. They were economically independent, whereas he was dependent on his patrons. His performances were part of private or public religious events, while the literary composition of the historians was their private concern. It is told that Herodotus gave public readings of his work, a practice that later became widespread in the Greco-Roman world; still, such a privately organized performance is on principle different from the way in which epic poetry and other oral traditions were recurrent elements in the festivals of early Greece.

Herodotus and Thucydides spent their lives composing their works, and yet both works remain unfinished. If the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had been composed in the same way, how many years would their composition have demanded? And would the poet have been able to keep hold of his storylines? If the poems were, instead, dictated by a rhapsode to a scribe, more or less in the same way as singers have dictated to scholars in more recent times, the process will probably have lasted a couple of months. Still a considerable job, but one that is more easily reconcilable with the fact that the poet did not lose command of his plots. Thus I submit that the mastery with which the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* handles his huge poems is based not on card indexes or anything of that nature, but on his professionally trained memory and creative powers. To put it in a more provocative form: the poems are so sophisticated because they were orally composed.

The relevance of oral comparison

My conclusion is that what Lord was fighting, when he declared that transitional texts were excluded on principle, was important and

¹ Weimann (1988) has interesting points about different kinds of authority in literature.

worth fighting against. The discussion was not only a question of transitional texts, but of the relevance in general of the oral comparison. As a matter of fact, the theory has had less impact in Homeric (and medieval) scholarship than it deserves, because Homerists have been unwilling to accept oral traditions as the proper framework for understanding the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The two poems are most often considered literary works composed on the basis of oral tradition, or they are considered transitional, which for the practical purposes adds up to the same thing. This fact has hampered the imagination of scholars, and only in recent years with the works of Gregory Nagy and his adherents have new winds been blowing. Their approach is mainly linguistically inspired, but they are open to anthropological and folkloristic experience, too (Nagy 1990, 1992; Martin 1989). In his 1991 presidential address to the American Philological Society, Nagy underscored the importance of Milman Parry and A. B. Lord's work for the overall approach to early Greek literature and recommended renewed study of the old Homeric questions.

Even though the oral theory has been with us for more than half a century and it has been the basis of much Homeric scholarship, in the meantime, I still feel that when it comes to understanding the marvels of oral aesthetics, in the Homeric poems as well as in other epic traditions, we are only just beginning.

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Epic Traditions in India



Indian and Euro-Afro-Asian Epic Traditions

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A preliminary multi-aspect framework is sketched here for the description of epic traditions in the Euro-Afro-Asian area (Christian Europe; Moslem North Africa, Near East and Central Asia; [non-tribal] India, both Hindu and Moslem; and partly, Buddhist Tibet and Mongolia). We will also examine the place of Indian epic traditions in this framework, both the classical (ancient and medieval) and modern vernacular tradition. We will try to find out what is their relation to other epic traditions in this vast area.

Definitions

The ethnopoetic genre of epic. Epic is a narrative genre. It can be couched in verse, in prose, as a theatrical performance, or in a combination of these. In its story, epic presents a confrontation between societies or between individual champions, who stand for their social groups. The societies can be either human or fabulous. The conflict in the plot is resolved in a combat which can be set in either the realistic mode (struggle in terms of physical prowess and human mental abilities) or in the fabulous mode (struggle in terms of human ability to act magic or in terms of inherent divine and demonic fabulous abilities). (See Jason 1975, 1977.)

Oral epic tradition. The following constituents make up the epic tradition of a society:

Lexicon: epic content elements of varied complexity; epic shares some of these elements with other ethnopoetic genres.

Syntax: rules for epic literary composition with the help of which

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simpler content units are combined to form more complex units, up to whole works.

Repertoire: the whole body of epic works which performers of a social or cultural unit carry or have carried or compose or have composed during the life of the tradition. The works are composed from the content units of the lexicon according to the syntax rules of composition. (Since we lack documentation of past oral performances, the beginnings of all epic traditions are not known today).

Performance: the various ways of oral performance of epics in their natural ambience and its musical and kinetic constituents.

Use: the immediate social context of the performance of an epic.

Function: the social, cultural and psychological function of an epic work or of the whole genre of epic in its society or community of bearers.

Context: the wider literary, cultural and social context of an epic tradition. This constituent does not belong to "epic tradition" proper, but envelopes it and influences it from "outside."

Categories of Epic Traditions

A general framework is outlined here for a preliminary description of epic traditions. The framework has four main aspects (many more could be added):

- 1) The relation of the literary work to the historical reality.
- 2) The complexity of an epic tradition.
- 3) The mode of existence of the characters in the literary work.
- 4) The macrocomposition of the literary work.

Relation of the literary work to historical reality

Four levels of symbolization are distinguished, from the concrete and particular to the abstract and general. These levels define epic sub-genres:

i) *Historical epic* tells of a struggle between humans (nations, tribes, clans, and champions). The events described and the characters playing various roles in them are, at least partially, real historical events and personages. This sub-genre is near to the ethno-poetic genre of historical song, historic legend and novella.

Examples: antique Greek: *Iliad*; Biblical epic, stories about kings Saul and David; Indian antique: *Mahābhārata* (overt layer); Germanic medieval cycle about the Burgundians; Turkic: early modern

collection "Dede Korkut"; Turkic oral epic of Kör-ogli; South Slav-ic oral heroic songs (see v. Buitenen 1973-78, Ganguli 1883-96, Sukthankar 1933-66; Uecker 1972; Lewis 1974; Karryev 1968; Jason n.d.).

ii) *National epic* tells about a national or tribal struggle of superhuman proportions. It does not adhere to real particular historical events and personages; a champion stands for the whole social unit.

Examples: Iranian: the medieval Rustam-cycle in the Shah-name; Russian oral *bylinas*; Indian (Rajasthani) oral epic of Pābūjī (overt layer) (see Warner 1905-25; Smith 1990).

iii) *Universal epic* tells about struggles between man and divinities friendly to man against demonic monsters which survived from the mythic epoch into human time. The protagonist (himself a divine/human half-breed) stands for the whole of humanity and his demonic (monster) adversary stands for all of the demonic (environmental) forces; he is the embodiment of "evil."

Examples: Sumero-Akkadian Gilgameš vs. Huwawa, Hittite weather god vs. snake/dragon Illuyanka, Indian Indra's and Durga's combats against *asuras* and *rakshasas*, Greek heroes' combats against monsters, Germanic Beowulf's combat against Grendel, Indian (Punjabi) oral vernacular Raja Rasalu vs. *rakshasas*/giants (see Pritchard 1969; Gaster 1961; O'Flaherty 1976; Gravees 1955; Swynnerton 1908; Temple 1881-1901).

iv) *Mythic epic* tells about struggles and wars between deities; the result of the struggle is the creation of the world and its order. The struggle is between the "good" and the "evil" on a very general level.

Examples: Ugaritic Baal vs. Yam (= ancient West Semitic: Sea) and Mot (= ancient West Semitic: Death), Akkadian Marduk vs. Tiamat (out of her body Marduk creates the human universe), Indian *devas* vs. *asuras* (see Driver & Gibson 1978).

The complexity of an epic tradition

Complex epic traditions. The complex epics are built of two layers: an overt human and a covert fabulous layer. Humans act on the overt layer moved by human emotions and interests. An indication of a "beyond" can be found in human ability to work magic or in the use by humans of fabulous weapons. As the society believes in human magic ability in the same measure as it believes in human physical and mental abilities, a naive listener needs not suspect a covert layer in the epic. In the covert layer humans stand for fabulous beings: they are avatars of deities or demons, half-breed sons of humans and deities or demons, incarnations of past avatars, etc.

This covert layer is explicitly stated in diverse ways, as exemplified by Indian and Greek antique epics. In the Greek epics, the activity, motivations and emotions of the deities are directly described by the narrator. In Indian epics an omniscient character tells about the deities' activities and motivations. In both cases it is there for everybody to hear.

In the modern vernacular oral epics in India it has been found that such a covert layer may be the special knowledge of a skilled professional performer, which the investigator can find out from him, but it is not performed by the singer in front of his audience and is not common knowledge in the narrating community (e.g. Epic of Pābūjī, Rajasthan, see Smith 1980: 54–55, 71 and 1986: 54). The two layers will be classified in different slots of our scheme.

In the overt layer the struggle is between humans: fabulous beings meddle in human affairs, humans have fabulous ability (of human magic) and fight with both human (physical) and fabulous magic means (*mantras*) and fabulous weapons (received from various deities and demons). The form of such epics is quasi-biographical. In the covert layer the struggle is between fabulous beings: between deities and demons or among deities themselves (e.g. Indra-Arjuna vs. Surya-Karna in the Mahābhārata). Both sides fight it out by activating their human incarnations and their half-breed sons, i.e., through humans and in human terms. In the struggles both physical and fabulous means are used (divine fabulous weapons which return to the deities after use by their human substitutes, and magic). In regard to divinities, the form of such epics is "detached": the whole Mahābhārata story is not a full biography of a deity (or a demon), say of Indra (through Arjuna) or Vishnu (through Krishna) but is one episode in their lives, one episode among many other episodes (or among a never-ending multitude of episodes as a deity does not die). Other episodes from the lives of the same deities are told in other traditions, epics or otherwise, e.g., the Rāmāyaṇa and the biography of Krishna are other such episodes of Vishnu; Indra's exploits against Vritra or Triśiras are the subject of other traditions; Zeus fights Titans, which has nothing to do with the Iliad, etc.

A third element in Indian classical epics is the ethical teaching embedded in them. This element seems to tie together the overt and the covert layers (the measure of success of this coupling is another question) and gives the action of the human characters its *raison d'être*. Setting aside the question of its oral or written-learned origin, the ethical element is present only when both the overt and the covert layer are explicitly voiced to the audience. If only the overt layer is performed, as is the case in the vernacular Epic of Pābūjī, then a possible ethical element, i.e., the explana-

tion of the characters' behavior and fates may be in the possession of the professional singer alone and thus have no bearing on the narrating community. (Cf. Smith 1980: 54-55, 71, 1986: 54; to my knowledge, Smith is the first person to notice this complexity of layers in the epic tradition.)

Unfortunately, we do not have as yet an ethnographic description of the narrating community of the Epic of Pābūjī (as regards either performers or audiences), so we do not know its place in the spiritual culture and specifically in the literature of the community, its social, cultural and psychological functions, etc. Thus we cannot assess the connection between the covert layer of the epic and the rest of the culture. In this respect, the tradition of Pābūjī is in the same position as the tradition of the Mahābhārata, of which we do not have (and in this case, cannot have) the ethnography of its early bearers (as well as early oral form).

An overt and a covert layer can easily be separated in the Iliad and Odyssey, too. Two groups of deities have a problem among themselves and fight it out by way of human combat (they send humans to do the fighting for them, so to speak). They direct, help, and hinder the human action in order to solve their own conflicts. That the conflict is the humans' is an illusion.

Simple traditions are of two kinds: the sub-genre of mythic epic in polytheistic cultures and the sub-genres of historical and national epic in monotheistic cultures.

Mythic epic: This kind of epic has no human layer and its protagonists are usually all deities and demons or monsters. If here and there a human acts upon a deity's request, he is expressly a tool, has no motivations of his own to act and does not represent a social body.

Monotheistic culture: As the covert layer requires that the members of a culture believe in the existence of multiple personified active divinities and demons who are in conflict, this layer is necessarily lacking in societies which profess a monotheistic religion (Christianity, Islam: Arabic, Persian and Turkic people; with the establishment of the ancient Israelite kingdom, the epic tradition disappears from Jewish culture). Instead of abstract and all-encompassing "good", "dharma", "evil", and other such universal values, represented and advocated by deities and demons, respectively, come more restricted social values, such as the "interest of our" society, clan, etc., the attainment of material goods (plunder; women belong to the category of plunder, if they are not fighting Amazons), the personal honor of a champion, the special knightly code of behavior for champions, etc. No other motivations and interests emerge in these epics. In this sense the epic can be labeled "simple". Not that in complex epics the characters, both human

and fabulous, are not motivated by wishes for material goods, social status and power, yet the quest for them is disguised by other, idealistic motivations of "good" and "evil", which come from the covert layer.

The mode of existence of characters

The character in an epic can exist in a realistic mode (i.e., it can be a human) or in a fabulous mode (it can be a fabulous being: a deity or a demon). Fabulous characters in both categories can have an anthropomorphic, a zoomorphic, or a composite monster-like shape, or the character may be of a mixed nature (avatars of deities or demons, half-breed sons of deities/demons and humans). The groups confronting each other in the epic may consist of any of the following or their combinations:

1) Two human groups (nations, tribes, clans) engage in combat.

1.1) Humans fight alone and fabulous beings do not intervene.

Examples: Biblical epic stories about kings Saul and David; Turkic collection "Dede Korkut", Turkic oral epic K r-og li, South Slavic oral heroic songs, Russian oral *bylinas*.

1.2) Humans do the fighting but are helped, hindered and directed by fabulous beings.

Examples: antique Greek Iliad and Odyssey (overt layer), Indian antique Mah bh rata and R m ya a (overt layer), Indian (Rajasthani) oral vernacular Epic of P b j  (overt layer) (see Bhatt 1960-75, Goldman 1984-).

2) Two different orders of fabulous beings fight with each other (groups of deities and /or demons; the groups are defined on various dimensions, such as generation, relation to humans, etc.).

2.1) Fabulous beings act alone, unaided by other beings.

Examples: Ugaritic Baal vs. Yam (= Sea) and Mot (= Death); Akkadian Marduk vs. Tiamat, Indian *devas* vs. *asuras*.

2.2) Fabulous beings need the help of humans to achieve victory (human or animal avatars of deities and demons, humans of mixed divine/demonic and human parentage, specially prepared humans, etc.).

Examples: Sumerian-Akkadian half-breed Gilgame  and specially created Enkidu vs. Huwawa; Hittite weather god and the human Hupasiya vs. snake/dragon Illuyanka, Indian Indra and a human wood-cutter vs. Tr   iras, Indian divine avatar R ma vs. demon R va a (covert layer), Indian (Rajasthani) oral vernacular P b j , who is both a divine avatar and a half-breed, vs. avatar Jindraw K     (covert layer).

The literary form: macrocomposition

All existing epic themes are organized into plots which are of the same nature as Aarne's "content-types", and that to an astonishing degree, just like folk tales, legends and ballads. Both the epics which have gone through many a rewriting and editing and the epics which have come fresh from oral performance feature the same content types. On the level of macrocomposition these types can be organized in two ways: as "detached units" and as "biographical chains".

Detached form. Each work in this category shows a closed plot, a whole story with its complication and solution, not connected to any other plot as a motivation for future action (another plot) or as a consequence of a previous incident (which occurred in another plot). In such a tradition, many champions play their roles as protagonists in individual works. These champions are pictured as belonging to the same generation and are functionally equivalent, with no central leader among them.

Examples: mythic epic of all traditions, antique Greek tradition, of which the Iliad is just one work among many (both overt and covert layers), Indian antique Rāmāyaṇa (covert layer) and Mahābhārata (covert layer), medieval French Chanson de Roland, which is just one work among many, Turkic early modern collection of several works "Dede Korkut", Tibetan oral and written Gesar (covert layer), South Slavic oral heroic songs, Russian oral bylinas, oral Caucasian epic songs about Narts, Indian oral vernacular songs about dacoits and recent rulers (see Sayers 1937; David-Neel 1959; Stein & Pemala 1981; Alieva 1974; Hamicaeva 1989-91).

Biographical form. This tradition contains or consists entirely of a whole biography of a champion who is the central protagonist of the whole cycle. The cycle may contain the history of the protagonist's family and his people before his birth, the birth of the protagonist and includes the story of his (heroic or legendary) death, and sometimes also a minor addition about the protagonist's descendants. There is no single central conflict in the cycle but many conflicts which are equivalent. Their order is for the most part arbitrary but for the birth and death stories. However, this arbitrary order can be traditionally fixed. Sometimes the single stories are ordered as a causal chain (cf. Smith 1985: 59-61 on the quasi-biographical tradition of Pābūjī in which a story serves as the motivation for another story and is in turn the consequence of a previous story). The whole cycle does not have a decisive culmination in the resolution of a central conflict. New stories can be "hung on" without difficulty. The conflicts and their resolutions are found in every separate story which is part of the cycle. For practical

reasons (length of performance) individual stories of the cycle are more often performed separately, in the way epics of the detached form are performed.

It could be supposed that the biographical cycle developed from the detached form. The prominence of the biographical cycle pushed into oblivion works of the detached form about other protagonists. Mongol people have preserved the detached form side by side with biographical cycles (the cycle of Gesar is a recent import); India also has both forms.

Examples: Sumero-Akkadian Epic of Gilgameš, antique Greek stories about Oedipus and his sons and about Hercules; antique Indian epics about Krishna and Rāma (overt layer), Tibetan epic of Gesar (overt layer), oral Armenian epic about the Sasoon family, Turkic epic of Manas, oral Mongol epic of Dzhangar, Indian (Rajasthani) oral epic of Pābūjī (overt layer) (see Lipskerov & Mkrtčayan 1989; Pen'kovskiy 1960; Bitkeev 1990).

Quasi-biographical form. There are traditions which have qualities of both the detached and the biographical forms. These are of two kinds:

1) The incomplete biography of fabulous beings. Deities and demons are born but usually do not die, thus they cannot have a complete biography. Their birth is a special event, they have various adventures, among them they take part in bellicose conflicts, which are of the "detached" nature in their epic form.

Examples: fighting victor-deities, such as Akkadian Marduk, Ugaritic Baal, Greek Zeus, Indian Indra and Durga and their divine or demonic opponents who either 1) periodically (yearly) return to life and have to be fought again, like Ugaritic Mot (= Death) and Yam (= Sea), or 2) of whom constantly new representatives appear who have to be fought against, such as the Indian *rakshasas* and *asuras* or 3) they are defeated once and for all, but their bodies are transformed into parts of the human universe and thus they live on, like Akkadian Tiamat and her husband Kingu.

1.1) The incomplete biography of humans. With the epics which came to us in written form from the past, we cannot know whether or not they told in their oral form full biographies of their protagonists. The written tradition brought us several such incomplete biographies; others are found in oral tradition.

Examples: the Biblical epic cycles about kings Saul and David tell in epic form only of Saul's heroic death, while David's death is not part of the epic tradition but of a chronicler's report. The Israelite written tradition says nothing about the birth of either. Germanic Beowulf has no birth story and his death is not heroic. The Spanish Cid has no birth story and his death is a chronicler's report. In oral tradition, South Slavic Marko, The King's Son, has

no birth story, and his death is of a legendary nature; he has no "first adventure" story. The Russian oral Ilja of Murom has no birth story and only a legendary death story. (See Markley 1961.)

2) The culminating-battle chain. The quasi-biographical chain grew around the plot narrating a particular conflict which leads to a grand battle. This battle forms the culmination of the chain, everything leads to it, the conflict dominates the biography of the participants. Incidents following the battle represent the aftermath of the battle and are unimportant.

Examples: antique Greek biography of Achilles which culminates in his death in the battle for Troy (overt layer), Indian biography of Rāma which culminates in the battle with Rāvaṇa (overt layer), Indian (Telugu) oral vernacular Epic of Palnāḍu which culminates in the battle at the field of Kārempūri in which all the protagonists die (overt layer); Indian (Tamil) oral vernacular Epic of the Elder Brothers (see Roghair 1982; Beck 1982, 1992-93).

Indian traditions, both classic and vernacular, do fit well into this framework. Throughout the paper we quoted them as examples, side by side with other Euro-Afro-Asian tradition from past and present. As we saw from the distribution of Indian examples, they do not amount to a uniform group. Rather, India harbors representatives of every kind of tradition found elsewhere in our cultural area. One should speak of many Indian epic traditions and not of an Indian epic tradition.

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Formulaic Expression in the Rāmāyaṇa: Evidence for Oral Composition?

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The Sanskrit epics, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa, together represent the culmination of a lengthy tradition of oral poetry, transmitted through recitation by *sūtas*, or bards.¹ The earliest stages in this tradition may probably be found in the *ākhyāna* ('narrative') hymns of the *Ṛgveda* and then in the eulogies and stories (*gāthā-nārāśaṃsī*, 'eulogies', *itihāsa*, 'chronicles', and *purāṇa*, 'ancient tales') subsumed within the *Brāhmaṇas*. The process of fusion of these shorter compositions into longer ballads and ultimately into the epics can no longer be traced in detail, although a little of it is still visible in the Mahābhārata. By comparison with classical Sanskrit literature, the style of the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki – despite the esteem in which it has been held as the *ādikāvya*, the first literary poem – is relatively simple, with few elaborate constructions or figures of speech. Indeed, one of its most obvious features is that formulaic expressions constitute an important element of its expression, since around one third of its narrative verses (*ślokas*) contain some formulaic material.²

The *pāda*-length phrases (i.e. those filling the quarter verse which is the main metric unit) that comprise a personal name and a

¹ All references to the epics are to their Critical Editions (*Mahābhārata* 1933–66, *Rāmāyaṇa* 1960–75). I use the term "passages" generically to designate all material excluded from their text in either the critical apparatus or Appendix I (unless context clearly indicates a more limited usage).

² I previously calculated (1970: 210–11) on the basis of the *Ayodhyā* to *Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍas* 'books' that: "The average proportion [of stereotyped *pādas*] over all three *kāṇḍas* is about 1 in 22 or 4.5%, which means that one in eleven lines or one in five or six stanzas in fact contain a full *pāda* found in identical wording elsewhere. But if all instances where the verbal similarity is less exact and where the resemblance extends over less than a *pāda* are included, then between 30% and 40% of all *śloka* stanzas contain some stereotyped material." The *śloka* is usually printed as two lines but in origin – and still to a large extent in the epics – it consists of four *pādas* or quarters of eight syllables, with the preferred metrical patterns of the first or third differing from those of the second or fourth; occasionally verses of six *pādas* or three lines are found.

standard epithet are the commonest of the various formulaic expressions, although I would stress that they are not used at random but have a definite narrative function. Other types are: the introductions and conclusions to speeches; various verbal formulae expressing emotion or emphasis; certain descriptive and hyperbolic phrases; stock expressions for battle scenes; phrases of time, place, and number; proverbs and similar expressions; and stereotyped similes. Such formulaic expressions mainly occur in the second and fourth *pādas*, except for those used after the conclusion of speeches, which for obvious reasons usually occur in the first (or third) *pāda*; however, the metrical pattern of the *śloka* means that there are usually different sets of formulae for the odd *pādas* from those for the even *pādas*. Another feature is the frequency with which a phrase or passage is repeated within a short space of its first occurrence and this is on the whole a mark of the epic's oral character; in several instances this is due to the repetition of the exact wording of a message or the narration to another character of some event already described. A more specialized form of repetition – and one with a definite emphatic purpose – is the use of refrains, found mainly in speeches as one of several rhetorical devices so used. Parallelism within the verse could be regarded as the extreme form of repetition but by contrast its function is emphatic and so it occurs predominantly within speeches. Examples of all of these types will be given next (Brockington 1970).

Formulaic references to persons

The use of a personal name and related epithet is particularly common and has often become stereotyped, as for example in *lakṣmaṇaḥ śubhalakṣaṇaḥ*, 'Lakṣmaṇa with the auspicious marks'. (Throughout this paper I shall include under the typical form variants simply of case, person, or number without further remark.) Such standardization of name and epithet – whether or not involving alliteration or the use of cognates – exemplifies the tendency to evolve stock phrases which by themselves constitute a complete *pāda* or else complete the *pāda* after a word of two or three syllables. While there is a stock of adjectives of varying lengths which permit this, certain adjectives are most used with particular individuals. Another feature is the occurrence of alternative forms to accommodate the oblique cases or the addition of a copula, for example, *lakṣmaṇasya mahātmanaḥ*, 'of noble (lit. 'great-souled') Lakṣmaṇa', and *lakṣmaṇaḥ ca mahābalaḥ*, 'and mighty Lakṣmaṇa'. Such formulaic *pādas* are naturally most common with the major figures, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumān, and Rāvaṇa, but various of the *mahā*-compounds in particular are commonly used with the minor characters.

The function of the personal epithets in such *pādas* is not only to facilitate the composition of the poem by providing the poet or reciter with ready-made building blocks but also to emphasize the aspect of the individual's character appropriate to the narrative. It is therefore particularly interesting to observe the way in which Rāma's nature is delineated by means of such expressions and the steady shift in emphasis as the epic developed.³ Much the commonest *pāda* and the one predominant in the earliest stage is *rāmasyākliṣṭakarmaṇaḥ*, 'of ever active Rāma'; in the Rāmāyaṇa this adjective is used almost exclusively of Rāma but in the Mahābhārata of both Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna (as Pārtha), in both epics highlighting the restless energy of their heroes. Next in frequency come *rāmo daśarathātmajaḥ*, 'Rāma, son of Daśaratha', and *rāghava-sya mahātmanaḥ*, 'of noble Rāghava', emphasizing Rāma's parentage and general nobility. These are followed by *rāmaḥ satya-parākramaḥ*, 'the truly brave Rāma', with its stress still on Rāma's valour, and then by *rāmo dharmabhṛtām varaḥ*, 'best of upholders of righteousness', with its emphasis on the upholding of tradition, which is very much a *kṣatriya*, 'warrior, noble', duty but also links with the more religious aspect present as the desire grew to assign divine status to Rāma, at first through comparison with Indra and subsequently by identification with Viṣṇu.

Formulaic expression is very marked in the *pādas* used to introduce or to conclude speeches, and there are various forms according to the length of name (either of speaker or addressee) which is usually included within the *pāda*; such expressions are shared to a large extent with the Mahābhārata, in spite of the use there of *extra metrum* announcements of the speaker. The commonest is *idam vacanam abravīt*, ('he spoke this word', i.e. 'as follows') followed by its shorter form – *vacanam abravīt*, where normally the name of either the speaker or the addressee completes the *pāda*; words of three syllables are accommodated with *x x x idam abravīt* or – when required by sandhi or metre – *x x x vākyam abravīt*. Similarly, at the end of the speech, *tasya tad vacanam śrutvā*, 'having heard that speech of his', is very common (alternatively with the name of the speaker in the first three syllables). Another common formulaic *pāda* used in connection with speeches is *ākhyātum upa-*

³ I use to describe this development the classification into five overlapping stages presented in my book (1984). The first stage is the reasonably homogeneous core of the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, the second stage comprises the material within those books which shows evidence of later reworking or addition, the third stage consists of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*, and the fourth and fifth stages comprise the *passages and App.I passages with good or poor manuscript support respectively. The main argument for this analysis into stages is contained in the second chapter (pp. 16–61) but a convenient tabular summary may be found on p. 330. The first and second stages each comprise about 37–38% of the text and the third almost 25%, with the fourth and fifth stages roughly equal in length to the text.

cakrame ('he commenced to narrate', with less frequent variants for the infinitive being *vyāhartum*, *pravaktum*, and *praṣṭum samupacakrame*, 'he began to recount, declare or ask').

Other of formulae categories

The formulae of emotion or emphasis include many expressions of surprise (such as *praharṣam atulaṃ lebhe*, 'he was immeasurably delighted', and *vismayaṃ paramaṃ gatvā / gataḥ*, 'becoming extremely amazed') and hyperboles (for example, *nāhaṃ jīvītum utsahe*, 'I cannot bear to live'), and again most are common to the Mahābhārata also. Indeed, *tato halahalāśabdaḥ*, 'then a tumultuous noise', is commoner in the Mahābhārata than in the Rāmāyana. It is perhaps appropriate to include here *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*, 'intent on the welfare of all beings' (for which there are also a number of minor variants), which Hein (1986) has seen as favoured by the non-Bhārgava editors of the Mahābhārata. However, in the Rāmāyana it is commoner in the passages which belong to the first stage of development of the epic, although its ethical implications clearly point to the emphasis on Rāma's moral grandeur which was to be a major motive in the development of the epic.⁴

Formulae connected with battle are of course particularly frequent in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, but also to a lesser extent in the *Āraṇyakaṇḍa*, and naturally in several cases they contain a strong element of hyperbole (*atiśayokti*), although others are simply standard descriptions of the start of combat, the weapons employed, and so on. Two of the commonest are *nayāmi / neṣyāmi yamasādanam* ('I am leading / will lead <you> to the abode of Yama [the god of death]', with many minor variants) and *x x devāsura yuddhe* ('in the war between the gods and anti-gods'). Other formulae describe the start of conflict, weapons and their employment, and the fall of warriors.

Among the phrases of time, there are basically two groups – those indicating the passage of a single day or night and those indicating longer or vague periods – with the first group including two *pādas* indicating the passage of time indirectly through the performance of morning or evening rituals (*kṛtvā paurvāhnikam karma* and *anvāsya / upāsya paścimam saṃdhyām*, 'after performing the morning/evening ritual'). One interesting feature is that several of

⁴ Occurrences of precisely this phrase in the two epics are: Rām. 1.28.10d, 3.1.14b, 6.14b, 37.8d, 45.10d, 61.4b, 4.50.9d, 6.16.16d; Mbh. 1.8.4d, 36.22b, 61.53d, 92.1b, 110.10d, 117.4b, 5.82.14d, 12.50.24b, 68.5b, 149.110d, 232.19d, 233.14d, 262.6d, 336.58d, 13.30.3d, 110.85b, 14.95.5d (also, for instance, *Vāmana Purāṇa* 39.91b and *Kūrma Purāṇa* 2.38.14d).

these phrases are restricted to the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*, though mostly common in the *Mahābhārata*; these are *etasminn eva kāle tu*, 'but at that time indeed', *tataḥ kālena mahatā*, 'then after a great time', *kasya cit tvatha kālasya*, 'but after some time', and *pūrṇavarṣasahasre tu*, 'in a full thousand years'. The first of these, *etasminn eva kāle tu*, occurs five times in the *Bālakāṇḍa* alone (and 51 times in the *Mahābhārata*), by contrast with the nearly equivalent phrase *etasminn antare* – 𑀓, 'in the interval', found throughout the rest of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (16 times in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas* and 17 times in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*).⁵

Among the phrases of place, the similarity of *kiṣkindhām vālīpālītām* 'Kiṣkindhā protected-by-Vālin' and *laṅkā / purīm rāvaṇapālītām* 'Laṅkā / the city protected-by-Rāvaṇa' is interesting, based as it is on structure as much as wording. Other phrases of place include several relating to the forest (*ramaṇīye vanoddeśe*, 'in a pleasant part of the forest', *aśokavanikāmadhye*, 'in the middle of the aśoka grove', *vane vanyena jīvataḥ*, 'living in the forest on forest fare', and *vanānyupavanāni ca*, 'forests and thickets'). There are also various somewhat stereotyped phrases for the ten directions and the seven seas, while a common expression of frequency is *śataśo'tha sahasraśaḥ*, 'hundreds and thousands of times'; however, the alliteration in all of these is as much a literary feature as a mark of orality.

Proverbs and similes

Around one hundred proverbs are found in the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with a considerable number more to be found in *passages (Brockington 1979). More than half are shared with the *Mahābhārata* but much smaller proportions are shared with other types of Sanskrit literature, indicating that the proverbial and related material forms part of the common epic tradition, although it should also be noted that the frequency of such material seems to increase in certain *sargas* (cantos/chapters) which appear to belong in their present form to the second main stage of the epic's growth, whereas the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* contain very few proverbs.

The more elaborate figures of speech are largely absent from the

⁵ The two instances of *etasminn eva kāle tu* previously noted (Brockington 1969) from the Bombay text of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* are excluded by the Critical Edition from the text, occurring at 7.85* pr. and App.I.8.146 pr. (it also occurs at 6 App.I.25.15 pr. and App.I.43.9* 1 pr.). There is an interesting difference concerning *etasminn antare* – 𑀓: the commonest word to complete the *pāda* in the core books is *vīraḥ*, whereas in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* it is *śūrah*, both words meaning 'hero'. Both phrases are common in the *Mahābhārata*, where *etasminn eva kāle tu* occurs 51 times in the text and *etasminn antare* – 𑀓 26 times.

Rāmāyaṇa and much the commonest figure is the simile (*upamāṇa*), of which most instances are simple comparisons offering only one point of likeness; many of them are shared with the Mahābhārata, evidently forming part of a traditional bardic stock (Brockington 1977). The proportion shared with the Mahābhārata varies from a sixth in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* to over a quarter in the *Araṇya* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, where the frequency of battle scenes has encouraged the use of standard images. The overall pattern of imagery used in similes is also similar to that found in the Mahābhārata. Indra is the commonest single object of comparison and similes involving the gods form a sizable group, with Yama the next most frequently mentioned deity. However, over half of all similes are drawn from the natural world. Among animal similes those based on elephants, lions, and snakes are particularly frequent and several of the elephant similes are variants on the stereotyped *totrārdita iva dvīpaḥ*, 'like an elephant stung by the goad'. Many of the similes involving the sun and moon are also highly stereotyped, along with many of the others drawn from the forces of nature. A few instances of more elaborate figures of speech (*rūpaka*, 'metaphor', *utprekṣā*, 'ascription', and *atiśayokti*) are also stereotyped: *nimagnaḥ śokaśāgare*, 'sunk in a sea of sorrow', *dārayann iva medinīm*, 'as if supporting the earth', with its variants, *sendrair api surāsuraiḥ*, 'by the gods and anti-gods along with Indra', and *trayāṇām api lokānām*, 'even of the three worlds', cf. also *triṣu lokeṣu viśrutaḥ*, 'famed in the three worlds'.

Although such forms of repetition are common to many, if not all, epic traditions, their roots in oral composition do not mean that the epic was always an oral production. The traditional phraseology does not disappear immediately writing is employed and the diction of a written work continues to show formulaic patterns. This clearly accounts for the tendency to greater frequency of stock *pādas* in the later parts of both the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. This increase in frequency is accompanied in the Rāmāyaṇa by substantial shifts in the formulaic expressions employed between its core in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas* and the later additions of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*. For example, among the *pādas* applied to Rāma that were noted above, *rāmo dharmabhṛtām vāraḥ*, 'best of upholders of righteousness', *rāmo daśarathātmaḥ*, 'Rāma, son of Daśaratha', and *rāmasyākliṣṭakarmaṇaḥ* are predominantly early but *rāmaḥ satyaparākramaḥ* is most frequent in the second stage; on the other hand the more overtly martial *rāmaḥ parapuramjayāḥ*, 'Rāma, conqueror of enemy forts', and *rāghavaḥ paravīraḥ*, 'Rāghava, killer of enemy heroes', are commonest in the fourth to fifth stages. Examples of *pādas* occurring predominantly or exclusively in the third stage include – in addition to the phrases of time already

mentioned – the various *pādas* formed from two *yathā*- compounds (e.g. *yathākalpam yathāvidhi*, ‘according to order, according to the rules’), *trailokyam sacarācaram*, ‘the three worlds, moving and still’, and *śṛṇu cedam vaco mama*, ‘listen to what I shall say’. Mostly these are particularly common in the *Bālakāṇḍa* but *praharṣam atulaṁ lebhe* is commonest in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, occurring as often there as in the whole of the rest of the text (Brockington 1969, 1970, 1985, 1993–94).

The pattern of variation between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* is also significant. The formulaic expressions in the two epics can broadly be divided into three groups: those found equally in both and thus presumably part of the common traditional stock, those found in the *Mahābhārata* but not in the *Rāmāyaṇa* or only in later parts, and those found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* but not in the *Mahābhārata* or only in late passages (Brockington 1985, Hara 1993, 1993–94⁶). The expressions common to both epics form the largest group and include all the categories indicated above, from stock similes through identical long compounds to introductions to speeches. However, in the case of the shared proverbs, the largest proportion of these in the *Rāmāyaṇa* come from the second stage (which often introduces a moralizing or didactic element). A large proportion of the shared similes occurs in battle scenes, which in general contain the highest proportion of stereotyped elements. There is clearly a substantial pool of formulaic *pādas* common to both epics but equally clearly there are peculiarities of phraseology which point to their separate origins; study of these may, as Hara puts it, “eventually enable us to detect peculiarities of each that reflect different historical factors in the formation of epic phrases: peculiarities of the historical and cultural backgrounds in which they were composed, differing backgrounds of the techniques used by ‘the singers of tales’ in the course of their oral transmission, their idiosyncracies of style, and so forth.” (Hara 1993–94: 150.)

An example of a *pāda* exclusive to the *Mahābhārata* is *tapasā dagdhakilbiṣaḥ*, ‘his/their evil burnt off by austerities’, occurring there twelve times, though “only in *Mahābhārata* books 1, 3, 12–15, and never in the so-called war books” (Hara 1993–94: 151), the nearest equivalent in the *Rāmāyaṇa* being a *pāda* found only in the third stage, *tapasā dyotitaprabhaḥ*, ‘with splendour made bright by austerities’. Another such *pāda*, found only in “the so-called war books of the *Mahābhārata* (6–9)”, is *mṛtyum kṛtvā nivartanam*, ‘making death the <only> return’, (with its variant in Mbh.7 only of *kṛtvā mṛtyum nivartanam*), which is never found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, despite the epics sharing the very similar

⁶ I am most grateful to Professor Hara for providing me with a photocopy of this paper before publication.

saṃyugeṣvanivartinaḥ, 'never turning back in battles'. A third is the long compound *palāyanaparāyaṇaḥ*, 'intent on flight', common in the Mahābhārata but absent from the Rāmāyaṇa (except 5.766* 2 post.). Particularly striking is the fact that the most frequent Mahābhārata phrase is found usually as the second *pāda* of the full line *atrāpyudāharantīmam itihāsaṃ purāṇanam* ('In this connection indeed they narrate the following ancient story', with many minor variants of the first *pāda*), which never appears in the Rāmāyaṇa, and even the second *pāda* is absent from the text (occurring only at 1 App.I.1.4, 6.3265* and 3703(G)* 5).

However, it is more instructive to consider those Mahābhārata formulae found only occasionally in the Rāmāyaṇa. A few occur even in the first stage and these – with their equivalents in the opposite direction – are for me the most problematic, since I consider on the basis of various other evidence that the two epics were originally independent of each other, though sharing a common background, and that they came together in the process of their growth to their present form; I believe that overall the distribution of such *pādas* also supports this view. Some parallels are probably purely coincidental but others are undoubtedly borrowed and in such cases the verse involved is presumably secondary, though embedded in earlier material. As I have pointed out (1985: 80), an obvious example is the full line *pāṇḍureṇātapatreṇa dhriyamāṇena mūrdhani*, 'with a white parasol held above his head', found only at 4.37.12ab in the Rāmāyaṇa (also 6.1882* 4) but eight times in the Mahābhārata, for such extensive parallelism cannot be accidental. By contrast, 'these and many others', *ete cānye ca bahavaḥ*, is so general a phrase that it might be expected to occur widely, yet it is very rare in the Rāmāyaṇa and very common in the Mahābhārata; so here the parallelism could well be accidental.

In later stages of the Rāmāyaṇa there are many *pādas* which are obviously borrowed from the Mahābhārata. Occasionally two such *pādas* occur in a single verse, thus effectively excluding the possibility of coincidence. A fine example is *etad icchāmyaḥam śrotuṃ paraṃ kautūhalaṃ hi me* ('I wish to hear that indeed, for I am very curious about it', Ram.1.1.5ab), since the first *pāda* occurs only here in the Rāmāyaṇa against 34 occurrences in the Mahābhārata and the second is limited to the *Bālakāṇḍa* (apart from 5 App.I.1.28 post.). The occurrence of a whole group of such *pādas* in a cluster in *sargas* 53 to 59 of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (belonging to the second stage) suggests borrowing from the Mahābhārata nearly as strongly as does occurrence of two in a single verse. In the case of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* the sheer number of *pādas* occurring only a few times there but commonly in the Mahābhārata speaks for itself (Brockington 1985: 82–83, 85–86).

Among the formulae typical of the Rāmāyaṇa incorporated into later stages of the Mahābhārata, some are of the type consisting of name and personal epithet which in general are specific to one epic or the other. Thus several Rāmāyaṇa phrases recur in the *Rāmopākhyāna* (Mbh.3.258–75) or in other passages based on the Rāmāyaṇa (Brockington 1978, 1986). Parallels between passages in the third book of each epic (Ram.3.1.3–10 and Mbh.3.145.29–32) indicate that one is borrowed from the other and the occurrence of two Rāmāyaṇa formulae in one common line establishes the direction of borrowing. In some other instances a degree of clustering is observable and may suggest that the section concerned was contributed by a *sūta* familiar with the Rāmāyaṇa. Others are more randomly distributed, often in particularly late parts of the Mahābhārata textual tradition (Brockington 1985: 87–88).

A fourth group of formulae whose distribution in both epics is relatively late provides some evidence of the changed interests of the later parts of both epics, since, although a few more general formulae first appear now (such as *tato prabhāte vimale*, 'then when day had dawned', and *prahṛṣṭeṇāntarātmanā*, 'with a joyful heart') and even one battle formula (*cakāra kadanam ghoram*, 'he produced a dreadful slaughter'), the majority have a broadly religious significance. Of these a number are specifically Vaiṣṇava but there are several which reflect general religious, ethical, or cosmological concerns, while links with the *Purāṇas* are becoming more obvious. By this period the two traditions had evidently merged and probably this, like the shift in interests, was a result of their transmission passing from the *sūtas* and other bards to the Brāhmans. Incidentally, within the Rāmāyaṇa tradition, the process of contact with the Mahābhārata seems connected more with the Northern recension.

The decay of the oral tradition

This material raises the question of how far we should treat the presence of formulaic material as an index of orality. The tendency towards greater frequency of formulaic *pādas* in the later parts of the Rāmāyaṇa, as of the Mahābhārata, is probably a symptom of the breakdown of the true oral tradition, when such features are deliberately imitated in order to give authenticity – or perhaps more accurately the right flavour – to later material. Certainly, this seems to be true of the *Purāṇas* which share a common background of oral, bardic composition with the epics, for the repetitiousness of their style is less a survival of the formulaic style typical of oral poetry than a symptom of their method of compila-

tion. My own feeling, although I have as yet insufficient data to establish it conclusively, is that the shift from oral to written transmission occurred between my second and third stages (but would not of course have happened all at once, any more than the cut-off between those stages is an absolutely sharp one). It is perhaps significant that the third stage displays a certain self-consciousness about the oral nature of the epic, since we have in the *Bālakāṇḍa* both the story of Nārada telling Vālmīki about Rāma (1.6–2.41), with its suggestion of Vālmīki himself as a bard (partly however contradicted by the emphasis on his having recourse to meditation to learn more of the story in *sarga* 3), and the narration of Vālmīki's composition by Kuśa and Lava (*sarga* 4), with its stress on recitation, while the *Uttarakāṇḍa* recounts Vālmīki's sending of Kuśa and Lava to recite the Rāmāyaṇa for the first time at Rāma's court (*sargas* 84–85) in a curious blending of old and new, recitation and first performance. Itinerant ballad-singers (*kuśīlava*, supposedly derived from the names of Kuśa and Lava) did later play a role in the dissemination of the epics among the population at large.

By contrast, the expansion of the core of the epic which is already apparent in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddhā kāṇḍas* was no doubt owed to the bards who recited it from memory, responding to the expectations of their audience, embellishing and augmenting the original story through the addition of episodes, descriptive digressions, and geographical details. Consequently, while there are some changes in the relative frequency of formulaic personal epithets, there is no large-scale replacement of one set of formulae by another, such as can be seen occurring between the second and third stages, and again in the fourth stage. By the third stage the originally separate traditions of the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa are coalescing, with the attendant effects on their formulaic diction, and even in some instances the likelihood that the borrowing has been from a written text of the other epic, so specific are the details. Here, however, the fact that our knowledge of the Sanskrit epics is based entirely on manuscript evidence could be distorting the picture. Nonetheless, the tendency to greater frequency of formulaic *pādas* in the later parts of both epics does seem to be not an index of orality but rather a sign of the decay of the genuine oral tradition.

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The Relationship of the Rāmāyaṇa to the Indic Form of "The Two Brothers" and to the Stepmother Redaction

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Kurt Ranke established that "The Two Brothers" (AaTh 303, according to the classification system of Aarne and Thompson 1961) was compiled somewhere in Europe and had, since the early Middle Ages at least, been carried all over Europe and beyond (Ranke 1934); the further it spread from its source, the more alterations it underwent. The Indic form as defined by Thompson and Roberts (1960, henceforth TR) has completely remodelled the first half of the tale (Ranke episodes A, "The Magic Birth", and C, "The Dragon-Slayer"), and modified motifs D 1 and 2 ("The Encounter with the Witch"). I have examined this Indic form (Brockington 1995) and tried to account for its distinctive features, attributing them in part to India's own social customs but much more to the great popularity of India's indigenous epics, the Rāmāyaṇa and to a lesser extent the Mahābhārata. Conversely, some later redactors of the Rāmāyaṇa may have drawn upon the same sources as the folktale. I shall not repeat the evidence and argument in detail here, but simply summarize my findings, then deal in more depth with one small topic in Ranke's Stepmother redaction. Summaries of the salient points in the relevant tales can be found in the Appendix to this paper.

The interesting point is not so much what changes were made, but why they were made, and what were the consequences. To start at the end of the folktale, it is clear that the gambling-game-with-the-witch modification is derived from the central episode of the Mahābhārata,² developed into a version of TR 217, "The Cat and the Candle"; but I can offer no explanation as to why this was done, so I will pass quickly back to the beginning.

¹ My attendance at the 11th Congress of the International Society for Folk-Narrative Research, Mysore, January 1995, at which this paper was delivered, was financed in part by a grant from the British Academy, whom I thank most warmly.

² 2.43–65 (trans. van Buitenen 1975, 2: 109–55). A similar scene is repeated in the story of Nala, a Mahābhārata in-tale 3.50–78 (van Buitenen 1975, 2: 322–64).

We must assume that the pivot of the "Two Brothers" story was felt to be the pauper hero's marriage to the princess; but in India this is socially inconceivable, so he is raised to the status of prince. This then presents another problem: the childless father is therefore now a king, so he must be given the impregnating food by someone of equal or higher social status than himself and of greater authority, and the food ought to be vegetarian, not fish. The solution is to transform the donor into a sage, and the food is often a mango. This supposed "Two Brothers" *Urform* now resembles the opening of the Rāmāyaṇa in a very general way, and shares some of its narrative problems. The accidental resemblance in plot leads to borrowing in both directions, not only of whole episodes, but, more significantly, of apparently trivial or inconsequential details, and to verbal reminiscences; when the storyteller comes to tell one tale, he – probably subconsciously – tells it in terms of the other. Yet each work largely keeps its own identity; neither should be regarded as either a source or a version of the other. There is good reason to suppose that this mingling took place first in north-eastern India, probably in Bengal; and one of the Rāmāyaṇa versions which may perhaps draw on "The Two Brothers" has been dated to 1337, so we can very tentatively conclude that "The Two Brothers" was known in India by the early fourteenth century at the latest.

To return to the narrative problems brought about by raising the status of the hero: how can he be caused to leave home to start his adventures? The European pauper boy leaves to seek his fortune, but the Indian prince has no need to do this, and a king is obviously not going to allow such a longed-for son to go off alone on a dangerous adventure. Both "The Two Brothers" and the Rāmāyaṇa adopt the same solution: the hero is taken away by a sage, the only figure in Indian society with sufficient authority to compel the heartbroken king's acquiescence.

Similarly, after the dangerous adventure has been successfully completed, both stories fail to send the hero straight back home to reassure his grieving parents, but make him embark on a further adventure which gains him the hand of a princess. The nature of the dangerous adventure is, however, different, although its purpose is broadly similar (the gaining of spiritual perfection for the sage). Unlike the Rāmāyaṇa, "The Two Brothers" unifies the whole opening episode, making the sage of the birth-story and the sage who takes away the grown hero the same person; he has procured the birth for this very purpose, and is in fact a malicious *kāpālīka* (a sinister figure from Hindu fiction intent on sacrificing the boy to his goddess). The boy escapes by killing the sage, using the Show-me-how technique. The whole episode is also found in

South Asia as an independent tale-type, TR 1121 A/B "The Yogi Beheaded/Boiled in His Own Pot of Oil". This unification of episodes produces an esthetically more satisfying and coherent structure for the folktale, though sometimes at the expense of a certain amount of logical inconsistency; but logic is not necessarily the chief consideration in storytelling.

Echoes of the Rāmāyaṇa can be found in details throughout most variants of "The Two Brothers". It is more significant to find the reverse situation, with details from "The Two Brothers" penetrating a number of the later vernacular literary or folk versions of the otherwise dominant Rāmāyaṇa: examples are the Show-me-how motif and the attempt to deceive the sage by sending him away with a substitute pair of brothers, who reveal their identity by their cowardice.³

Despite its strong roots in Indian literature and Hindu practices, the Indic modification of "The Two Brothers" is not confined to South Asia. In the far distant south-west corner of Iran two variants have been collected (Lorimer 1919). No. 38 is much modified, but No. 32 is extremely well-preserved, though it also has introduced modifications, some of which make it more appropriate to its Muslim context. More surprisingly, three variants of the Indic form have been collected in south-east Europe (Dawkins 1953, Nametak 1975, and Wratislaw 1889); here, the specifically Indian features generally appear in an even more attenuated form. Variants of the European form exist side by side with these Indic variants; some have the European plot outline, but details or reminiscences of the Indic form, occasionally giving an incongruous mixture. I can only conclude that this Indic form has been reflected back into the Europe of the tale's origin, presumably under Muslim influence.

I turn now to what Ranke termed the Stepmother redaction. I should like to spend a little time on it because, for reasons of space, I do not treat it in detail in my 1995 article. Despite a gap in the available evidence, I suggest that this development also has its roots in the Rāmāyaṇa.

Variants of the Stepmother redaction are concentrated in North Africa, with three more from Italy alongside a large number of Italian variants of the standard European forms. I think it is clear that the direction of spread was in this case from Africa to Italy and not the reverse, for the basic situation pre-supposes a polygamous culture. The boys are born simultaneously to a man's two wives. One mother dies and the other brings up both boys, but they resemble each other so completely that she cannot distinguish which is her own son until a trick reveals the truth. Such confusion

³ The cowardice motif also occurs in the Balti story of Kesar, in an episode reminiscent of this part of the Rāmāyaṇa; see Söhnen 1981.

becomes incredible in Ranke's RI 13, where one boy is not born until after the death of the first wife and subsequent re-marriage of his father. This point was evidently felt by the redactors of RI 3 and 9, which do not have the recognition trick.

We all know that jealous stepmothers are common villains in fiction of all types. They provide an author with an easy excuse for turning the hero out into the world, alone and friendless, to get on with his adventures untrammelled by commitments to home and family; death of both parents in a car or plane crash is now a much-favoured substitute. I therefore attach no significance to the use of this motif as such. Indeed, it occurs in several variants which are totally unconnected with the Stepmother redaction, such as Ranke's CI 4, where the boys are full brothers, all three of them stepsons of the wicked woman.

As I see it, the salient point is that in the Stepmother redaction, the boys are almost always half-brothers, but the boy who is favoured by his own mother at the expense of her stepson nonetheless allies himself with his half-brother, sometimes to the extent of rejecting his mother; in Ranke's Berb 5 and Arab 1/2 he goes so far as to offer to kill her, and in Berb 6 he wants to accompany his half-brother and is only dissuaded after the misused boy makes a prolonged appeal to his half-brother's duty as a son. This, surely, is odd. Does not a stepmother's own favoured child usually side with her against the stepsibling? But such is also the basic situation of the Rāmāyaṇa. Kaikeyī contrives to have her own son, Bharata, appointed heir apparent, and his half-brother Rāma – his father's favourite – banished (accompanied at their insistence by his wife and another half-brother, Lakṣmaṇa); but Bharata reviles and curses his mother,⁴ rejects the kingship, and sets out to bring Rāma back; only in obedience to Rāma's steadfast insistence does he agree to return to the capital to act as regent while Rāma completes the term of his exile.

The problem is that as far as I know no variants of the Stepmother redaction have yet been identified in South Asia, nor any full variants of the Indic form in North Africa. That TR 303 Ind could have been carried to the Arab world and Africa by Arab traders is not at all implausible, for a well-preserved variant has been found in the Malagasy republic, and the variant from Zanzibar is a good example of the associated TR 1121 Ind ("The Yogi Boiled in His Own Pot"). But without firm evidence this suggestion must remain speculative. One fact which tends to support it is that many South Asian folktales open with the Stepmother motif (though without the recognition trick which accompanies it in the North African Type 303). One group amongst them (TR 131, "The

⁴ 2.67–68 (trans. Pollock 1986, 2: 226–29).

Tiger as False Friend to the Cow" and its human counterpart in Day 1883: No. 4)⁵ involves children who reject their mother in favour of a half-or foster-brother in an even more extreme fashion than the boy in the Stepmother redaction. The companions escape, and are then often involved in a "Dragon-Slayer" episode (TR 300). TR 300 has been widely collected in South Asia, but one Indian variant names its joint heroes as Rāma and another brother, Lakṣmaṇa; and AaTh 300 is of course incorporated into a great many of the European forms of Type 303. Perhaps this association between "The Two Brothers" and the Rāmāyaṇa was made and transmitted to the Arab world before Type 1121 with its malicious sage replaced Type 300, thus creating the distinctive Indic TR 303. Or perhaps I am simply overlooking some perfectly good indigenous Arabic story which could have given rise to the Stepmother redaction.

Whichever is the case in this one detail, we should not underestimate the influence of "The Two Brothers" and the Rāmāyaṇa on each other's development.

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⁵ That Ranke should have identified this tale as an actual variant of Type 303 – misguided, in my opinion – is at least indicative of a close relationship between the tales.

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Appendix: Selected Texts and Variants (with Ranke's classification numbers)

The *Rāmāyaṇa*: indigenous Indian literary/oral epic-romance in many versions. The oldest is that ascribed to Vālmīki. Four sons are born after performance of a ritual for a childless king. Rāma is taken away by a sage to fight a monster; he then wins a princess as wife in a trial of strength. A jealous stepmother, Kaikeyī, contrives to have Rāma exiled in favour of her own son; his brothers and wife all support him in his subsequent adventures.

The *Mahābhārata*: indigenous Indian literary/oral epic. A voluminous collection of tales and didactic material gathered around the story of the rivalry of the Kurus and their cousins the Pāṇḍavas over disputed succession rights. For a while the five Pāṇḍava brothers succeed in winning power, but abruptly lose it again when, as part of the consecration ritual, the king engages in a game of dice with his rivals' representative. He is cheated when he stakes and loses successively wealth, various animals, army, country, people, royal regalia, brothers, himself, and finally his wife. After a period of exile, the Pāṇḍavas defeat their cousins in a cataclysmic battle.

AaTh 303 "The Two Brothers" / "The Twins or Blood-Brothers"

Two sons are born to a poor childless couple after the mother eats a magic fish; one boy kills a monster and marries a princess, then is turned to stone by a witch. His brother, alerted by a life token, rescues him after sleeping chastely with the boy's wife (often symbolized by the sword-of-chastity motif); the jealous boy kills his brother, then learns the truth from his wife and resuscitates him.

TR 303 "The Two Brothers", Indic form (full versions)

Bezbaroa, Lakshminath 1955: The Giant Astrologer. In *Tales of a Grandfather from Assam*. 21–22. Bangalore. [From Assam.]

Childless, rich, old couple given twins by giant disguised as astrologer; contract to return one boy. Boys lavishly educated and accomplished. Astrologer returns for elder boy at unspecified age; no cavil or attempt at deception. Life token. Boy warned by skulls of previous victims that giant intends to eat him; decapitates giant (no Show-me-how) and restores other victims. No marriage. On the way home boy is lured into cave and suffocated by giantess in form of deer, who intends to eat him. Alerted by life token, brother finds and kills giantess, resuscitates boy; both return to parents.

Borgohain, B. K. & Chaudhury, P. C. Roy 1975: The Story of the Twins. In *Folk-Tales of Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram*. 100–01. No 31. Delhi. [Fragmentary version from Tripura.]⁶

No birth-story. Twins' identical appearance leads to sexual jealousy and forgiveness. Demons challenge one boy to play game for wager; he wins so they kill him. Life token; brother resuscitates him; demons become servile and help them win a kingdom.

Crooke, W. (ed.) 1893: The Prince and the Sadhu. In *North Indian Notes and Queries* 3: 51. No. 107. [From Mirzapur.]

Childless king granted twins by Sadhu. Contract. Sadhu returns after one year; unsuccessful attempt at deception. Life token. Laughing skulls warn of impending sacrifice, advise use of Show-me-how trick. Sadhu decapitated, previous victims restored. Boy earns gratitude of animals (no consequence). Princess chooses him for husband (she is not given as a reward, nor mentioned again). When hunting, boy meets *rākṣasī* who uses cat and lamp to cheat him in gambling game; boy imprisoned. Brother alerted by life token uses dog to defeat *rākṣasī*, frees boy and takes him home to father.

Day, Lal Behari 1883: The Man Who Wished to be Perfect. In *Folk-Tales of Bengal*. 187–96. No. 13. London. (Ranke Ind 6.) [From Bengal.]

Mendicant gives drug to queen to produce twins. Contract. Boys are accomplished and handsome. At age 16 the mendicant returns, both boys offer to go. Life token. Animals accompany boy, who enjoys life in the forest. While hunting, boy enticed to forbidden direction by deer, beautiful *rākṣasī* invites him to gamble; he loses successively animals and self, is imprisoned to be eaten later. Alerted by life token, brother also gains animals, is told by mendicant where to find boy, gambles with *rākṣasī* and wins back animals and boy. *Rākṣasī* warns them that mendicant intends to sacrifice boy to Kālī to gain perfection; confirmed by laughing skulls, who advise use of Show-me-how trick. Boy decapitates mendicant, restores previous victims; Kālī is propitiated, grants perfection to boy. Brothers return home; no marriage.

Elwin, Verrier 1944: The Faithful Brother. In *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal*. 34–36. Oxford. [From the Baiga tribe, Rewa State, Central India.]

Childless *rājā* given mango by Sadhu; contract. Sadhu returns at age 12; unsuccessful attempt at deception. Life token. Heads advise use of Show-me-how trick. Sadhu prepares pot of boiling oil but is decapitated. Boy accompanied by grateful animals. *Rājā* gives him his daughter (no explanation); enticed by deer to forbidden direction (north), falls into a well and dies. Brother alerted by life token, mistaken for boy by wife (sword of chastity), follows deer but does not jump into well; resuscitates boy.

⁶ Not identified as such, however, in Jason's survey of this collection (1989).

Jealousy motif.

Mayeda, Noriko & Brown, W. Norman 1974: The Two Princes. In *Tawi Tales: Folk-Tales from Jammu*. 215–22. No. 67. American Oriental Series. 57. New Haven. [From Jammu.]

Sonless king given twin sons by dervish; contract. Boy reclaimed (age unspecified). Life token. Boy sees skeletons, but is warned by captive giant. Boy throws dervish into pot of boiling oil, restores previous victims. Boy accompanied by grateful animals. Princess chooses him as husband. Boy humiliates jealous brothers-in-law. Boy enticed by deer in forbidden direction, dices with beautiful princess who kills him. Brother alerted by life token, mistaken by wife (sword of chastity), warned by old woman, takes cat to eat rat which had been helping princess; wins, forces princess to restore boy, then kills princess. Jealousy motif.

Mayeda, Noriko & Brown, W. Norman 1974: Supplementary Version 1. 530–33. [From Jammu.]

Childless king given twins by Sadhu (rite performed and special fruit eaten); contract. Sadhu returns at age 7, boy reluctantly given up. Life token. Boy warned by old woman that Sadhu intends to eat him and advised to use Show-me-how trick. Boy pushes Sadhu into pot of boiling oil, restores previous victims. Boy founds city and rules there, till he quarrels with a neighbouring prince about a deer they are both hunting and is enslaved until chosen by a king to marry his daughter. When out hunting, boy is surrounded by enemies. Alerted by life token, brother follows and is mistaken for boy (but does not meet wife), rescues boy; both rule kingdom.

Schulze, Paul 1922: Der dienstbare Geist. In *Drawida-Märchen der Kuwi-Kond*. 124–36. No. 24. München. [From South India.]

Childless king promised four sons by Brāhman (two mangoes, to be shared between him and two wives); contract. One wife cheats, bears four crippled sons; the other bears two splendid sons whom she keeps hidden from their father to avoid fulfilling contract. Brāhman returns (age unspecified) and rejects all four cripples as too cowardly; king recognizes splendid twins; one is reclaimed by Brāhman and joyfully agrees to fulfill father's vow. Snake warns boy that Brāhman intends to sacrifice him to goddess Mahā-lakṣmī, advises use of Show-me-how trick. Boy decapitates Brāhman, which frightens the demon into agreeing to act as his slave; demon restores previous victims. Boy disguises self as old man; AaTh 300; demon-slave builds wonderful palace; boy humiliates brothers-in-law and is at last revealed as handsome youth (this part of the tale is much elaborated; the rest is added in the briefest fashion). Boy loses wager with dancer, who is a witch and turns him to stone. Brother alerted by life token (first mention), follows and is mistaken for brother by wife, who tells him what has happened (no sword of chastity). Boy has meanwhile been resuscitated by demon-slave.

TR 303 "The Two Brothers" Indic form (remote versions)

Bompas, Cecil Henry 1909: The Ferryman. In *Folklore of the Santal Parganas*. 293–94. No. 97. London. [From the western borders of Bengal.]

No birth-story. Successful ferryman's jealous, unsuccessful half-brothers set him adrift on river. He kills a monster snake, consequently marries a girl and they live like *rājā* and *rānī* in deserted village. He goes to forbidden direction (south), helps grateful animals, rescues a man who then pushes him into well; wife rescues him.

Parker, Henry 1910–14: The Story of the Gamarāla's Son. In *Village Folk-Tales of Ceylon*. 3 vols. 3: 78–83. No. 196. London. [From Śrī Laṅkā.]

Childless village headman given two sons by Sannyāsi who performs spell; contract voluntarily fulfilled. Life token. Boy advised by man how to avoid Sannyāsi's trap; monster kills Sannyāsi instead of boy, who gains treasure, then wins bride in contest. Wife sends him on dangerous missions, then orders him to wrestle with a female monster, who kills him. Alerted by life token, brother follows and wrestles with monster, wins, and compels her to resuscitate boy. Further unrelated adventures.

AaTh 303 "*The Two Brothers*" anomalous European form

Mayeda, Noriko & Brown, W. Norman 1974: Supplementary Version 2. 533–35. [From Jammu.]

Childless woodcutter's wife conceives after eating mango. Elder boy goes to seek fortune. Life token. Boy chosen as husband by princess. Boy sees fire on mountain, is turned to stone by old woman throwing red leaves on him. Alerted by life token, younger brother follows, is mistaken for boy but reveals identity to wife; compels old woman to restore boy and previous victims by showering them with blue leaves; turns old woman to stone.

TR 303 "*The Two Brothers*" Indic form collected outside South Asia

Lorimer, D. L. R. & Lorimer, E. O. 1919: The Story of the Two Golden Brothers. In *Persian Tales*. 212–19. No. 32. London. (Ranke Per 2.) [A detailed variant from Bakhtiārī, Southwest Iran, told with verve and humour.]

Childless wealthy man given twins by dervish (pomegranate eaten); contract. Twins are well-educated. Dervish returns at age 18; boy yielded reluctantly (no attempt at deception); both offer to go. Life token. Boy warned by old man that dervish will behead him when drinking from stream (no reason), advises use of Show-me-how trick. Dervish decapitated. Water of stream turns boy to gold. Headman gives him his daughter. While hunting, boy enticed into cave by gazelle, who turns into beautiful fairy and defeats boy in wrestling match and imprisons him. Alerted by life token, brother follows; told boy's fate by same old man, who advises him how to defeat fairy. Mistaken for boy by wife (sword of chastity). Brother defeats fairy, forces her to restore boy and release other prisoners; marries fairy.

Lorimer, D. L. R. & Lorimer, E. O. 1919: The Story of Tāling, the Half-Boy. In *Persian Tales*. 251–55. No. 38. [Remote version from Bakhtiārī.]

Wealthy childless man given apples by dervish for each of seven wives; no contract. One wife eats only half apple, so bears only half-son. Six brothers successively imprisoned after losing wrestling match with male ogre, half-boy defeats and kills ogre, frees prisoners. Shamed brothers try to abandon half-boy down a pit, but he tricks them and escapes.

Dandouau, André 1922: *Contes populaires des Sakalava et des Tsimihety*. Alger. (As reported in Haring 1982: 469–73.) [From Malagasy Republic.]

Childless woman given twins by sorcerer/ogre (potion); unsuccessful attempt to evade fulfilment of contract. Ogre boiled in water. Boy gilded. Grateful animals. In disguise, is chosen as husband by princess and eventually recognized. Loses game, imprisoned by beautiful woman. Brother mistaken by wife (sword of chastity), rescues boy (TR 217), killed by jealous boy and resuscitated.

Dawkins, R. M. 1953: The Younger Brother Rescues the Elder. In *Modern Greek Folktales*. 243–48. No. 38. Oxford. [From Pontos.]

Childless king granted twin sons by devil (apple); contract. Unsuccessful attempt to evade fulfilment. Life token. Warning from co-genital horse.

Devil (now in form of serpent) decapitated by Show-me-how trick, which liberates beautiful girl (i.e. TR 1121 merged with 300); she sleeps with boy. Animals gilded. Boy decoyed by wild goat, which is blackamoor in disguise, who defeats him at cards and imprisons him. Alerted by life token, brother follows, is mistaken by girl (sword of chastity), liberates boy; blackamoor turns into a girl, brother marries her.

Nametak, Alija 1975: The Gilded Twins. In *Narodne pripovijesti bosansko-hercegovačkih Muslimana*. No. 7. Sarajevo [From Pećigrad, Bosnia.]⁷

Birth contract. Boy and animals gilded. Princess chooses to marry boy. Boy loses game with witch, turned to stone. Alerted by life tokens, brother follows, mistaken by wife (sword of chastity). Restores boy.

Wratislaw, A. H. 1889: The Two Brothers. In *Sixty Folk-Tales from Exclusively Slavonic Sources*. 246–51. No. 46. London. (Ranke SS 7.) [From Serbian area of Bosnia.]

Childless old man given two sons by mysterious stranger (apple). No contract; boys leave to seek fortune. Boy gilded, princess attracted to him; they marry. Boy decoyed by stag, plays draughts with girl who cheats and imprisons him. Brother follows (no life token), mistaken by wife, defeats draughts-player, liberates boy. Jealousy motif. Brother marries draughts-player/queen.

AaTh 303 Stepmother redaction

The boy leaves home to avoid the cruel treatment of his stepmother, who has been unable to distinguish him from her own son until tricking the boys, who remain close friends, into revealing the truth.

Müller, David Heinrich 1902–07: Geschichte zweier Brüder. In *Die Mehri- und Soqotri-Sprache*. 3 vols. 1: 69–91. Wien. (Ranke Arab 2.)

Two sons born simultaneously to man's two wives. One wife dies, survivor tricked into thinking both are hers. Old woman reveals truth, advises trick to distinguish true (more considerate) son. She is jealous of stepson (bolder than own son), repeatedly attempts to kill him, until he leaves home. Life token. Boy marries, sleeps chastely, enticed to leave wife by light seen at night from beautiful woman imprisoned by demon; kills demon and lives 10 years with wife 2. Eventually boy poisoned and wife 2 abducted. Alerted by life token, brother follows, mistaken by wife 1 (chastity), finds and resuscitates boy following example of raven, both liberate wife 2. Brother marries wife 1.

Reinisch, Leo 1900–03: Geschichte zweier Brüder. In *Die Somali-Sprache*. 3 vols. 1: 259–77. Wien. (Ranke Arab 1.) Translation into Somali of Müller's original text.

Basset, René Marie Joseph 1897: L'ogresse et les deux frères. In *Nouveaux contes berbères recueillis, traduits et annotés*. 103–07. No. 104. Paris. (Ranke Berb 1.) [Collected at Cherchel, in the Beni Menacer dialect.]

Simultaneous birth to two wives, one dies, other brings up both boys, trick distinguishes true son, she feeds stepson badly till he leaves home. Life token. No wife. Disappears. Brother follows him. Ogress comes to his camp fire, asks for fire, asks to have dogs and horse bound, he realizes she is the culprit, kills her and resuscitates brother by following the example of spiders.

Rivière, J. 1882: Les deux frères. In *Recueil de contes populaires de la Kabylie du Djurdjura*. 193–99. Paris. (Ranke Berb 2.)

⁷ I am indebted to Dr. Maja Boskovic-Stulli, through the kindness of Dr. Mislav Ježić of Zagreb, for information about this variant.

Simultaneous birth to two wives (as Basset). Stepson leaves. Dragon-slayer. Ogress eats him when he hunts on her territory, deliberately ignoring warning. Wife deceived, but brother does not stay the night. Boy resuscitated following example of quarrelling spiders.

Frobenius, Leo 1921–22: Der Drachenkampf. In *Atlantis: Volksmärchen und Volksdichtungen Afrikas*. 12 vols., vols. 2–3. *Volksmärchen der Kabylen*. 2: 79–90. No. 9. Jena. (Ranke Berb 5.)

Boys are step-brothers (identical but not related). Recognition trick. Stepson badly fed, true son sides with step-brother, who will not allow him to accompany him on flight. Life token. AaTh 303.

— 1921–22: Die Stiefmutter. In *Atlantis: Volksmärchen und Volksdichtungen Afrikas*. 12 vols., vols. 2–3. *Volksmärchen der Kabylen*. 3: 237–46. No. 47. (Ranke Berb 6.)

Simultaneous birth (as Basset). Stepson will not allow true son to accompany him. Life token. True son reproaches mother. AaTh 303.

Destaing, É. 1907–11: Légende de 'Alia Bent Mançoûr. In *Étude sur le dialecte berbère des Beni-Snous*. 2 vols., 2: 39–46. No. 52. Paris. (Ranke Berb 8) [Collected in Algeria.]

Simultaneous birth [as Basset.] Stepson badly fed. Life token. AaTh 303 + 300.

Basile, Giambattista 1925: La cerva fatata. In *Il Pentamerone*. Ed. Benedetto Croce. 2 vols. 1: 111–20. No. 9. Bari. (= Basile, Giambattista 1932: The Enchanted Hind. In *The Pentamerone*. Trans. from the Italian of Benedetto Croce, ed. N. M. Penzer. 2 vols. 1: 85–93. Day 1. No. 9. London. (Ranke RI 3.) [From Italy.]

Wife and maid of childless king given sons by sage after eating sea-monster's heart; no contract. Queen is jealous of boys' affection, maltreats and tries to kill maid's son. He leaves. AaTh 303.

Comparetti, Domenico 1875: Cannelora. In *Noveline popolari italiane*. 199–205. No. 46. Torino. (Ranke RI 9.) [From Italy.]

Similar opening to Basile. AaTh 303.

Weber, Carl 1900: L'animale dalle sette Teste. In "Italienische Märchen in Toscana aus Volksmund gesammelt." In *Forschungen zur romanischen Philologie: Festgabe für Hermann Suchier*. Ed. J. Bédier et al. 310–13. No. 1. Halle a. S. (Ranke RI 13.) [From Italy.]

Man has one wife and two sons. Wife dies, he remarries, has third son: all three identical. Recognition trick. Stepsons badly fed. AaTh 300 + 303.

Compare:

Ó Domhnaill, Mícheál 1927–28: Scéal Triúr Cloinne Rí Eireann. *Béaloides* 1: 378–87. (Ranke CI 4.) [From Ireland.]

Stepmother contrives banishment of king's three sons; AaTh 303.

TR 1121 "The Yogi Beheaded/Boiled in His Own Pot of Oil"

Boy in power of malicious Yogi is forewarned by skulls of previous victims to escape by using Show-me-how trick to kill Yogi. Many variants from South Asia, also:

Steere, Edward 1870: The Spirit Who was Cheated by the Sultan's Son. In *Swahili Tales as Told by Natives of Zanzibar*. 381–89. London. [From Zanzibar.]

Sonless Sultan given three sons by demon (medicine); contract. Reluctant fulfilment. Boy sees skulls, but warned by horse that demon will eat him, advised to use Show-me-how trick. Demon boiled in cauldron of ghee, eaten by guests. Boy becomes king's favourite, marries his daughter.

TR 131 "*Tiger as False Friend to the Cow*"

A tigress kills and eats her friend, a cow; tigress' cub and calf, warned by life token, run away together and have adventures.

Bompas, Cecil Henry 1909: The Tiger Cub and the Calf. In *Folklore of the Santal Parganas*. 320-22. No. 111. London. [From the western borders of Bengal.] TR 131.

Bompas, Cecil Henry 1909: The Sons of the Tigress. In *Folklore of the Santal Parganas*. 453. Appendix, no. 2. [From the western borders of Bengal.]

Heroes are two human sons of tigress. They kill their mother. TR 300.

Elwin, Verrier 1944: The Cow and the Tigress. In *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal*. 430-31. Oxford. [From the Gond tribe, Bondar, Mandla District, Central India.]

Heroes are human sons of cow and tigress; cow's son kills tigress as precaution. TR 300. Cow survives.

Crooke, W. (ed.) 1893-94: The Cow and the Tigress. In *North Indian Notes and Queries* 3: 122-23. No. 260. [Collected in the Pilibhit District.]

Heroes are animals. Tiger cub avenges cow on tigress.

Sharma, Nagendra 1976: Hansey and Bansey. In *Folktales of Nepal*. 108-10. No. 30. Delhi. (Possibly re-written by editor.)

Similar to previous variant. Tiger cub kills mother.

Compare:

Day, Lal Behari 1883: The Story of the Rakshasas. In *Folk-Tales of Bengal*. 64-92. No. 4. London. (Ranke Ind 5.) [From Bengal.]

Heroes are human half-brothers, sons of man with human and *rākṣasī* wives. *Rākṣasī* kills man and other wife; her son kills her. TR 300.

TR 300 "*The Dragon-Slayer*"

Princess offered as reward for killing monster; hero kills monster, removes tokens from corpse which prove his identity when unwelcome, low-class impostor tries to claim princess as bride. Many variants, including:

Bodding, P. O. 1925-29: Rakas ar dom reak': The Ogre and the Dom. In *Santal Folk-Tales*. 3 vols. 3: 284-88. No. 62. Oslo. [From the western borders of Bengal.]

The joint heroes are Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, heroes of the Rāmāyaṇa; they do not accept princess as bride.

TR 217 "*The Cat and the Candle*"

A man is cheated in a game of chance with a woman and imprisoned; she has distracted him at a vital point in the game, often with the help of a cat. The man's rescuer uses some other animal to chase away the cat. Man or rescuer often marry woman. Many variants from South Asia and elsewhere.

Creating a Modern Epic: Oral and Written Versions of the Hindi Epic *Ḍholā*

SUSAN S. WADLEY

My primary concern today is the interaction between written and oral versions of a North Indian epic known as *Ḍholā*. In part, I want to look at the facets of oral versus written performance that compel one singer and poet to create two markedly different productions – one orally performed before village audiences, or in a recent innovation, for commercial sale on audio cassettes, and the other written to be printed and circulated by a leading publisher of regional traditions.

In western Uttar Pradesh and eastern Rajasthan, in a region whose core is known as *braj kshetra*, an epic tradition known as *Ḍholā* has existed for several hundred years. Considered by local scholars to be *mahakāvya*, or “great poetry” (as are the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*), this epic tradition continues to be immensely popular.

I first heard *Ḍholā* sung while doing doctoral dissertation research in 1968 in a village about 80 miles east of Agra, some 150 miles southeast of Delhi on the western fringes of the region where *Ḍholā* is commonly heard. It was a hot muggy August day and Ram Swarup, my first and still primary guide to *Ḍholā*, sang in the village rest house packed with men freed of field work by the monsoon rains. Since then I have worked with five other groups and collected more than a dozen printed versions and a large number of commercially available audio cassettes. Much to my surprise this epic which was essentially unknown in scholarly circles here and abroad had become by 1989 a “best seller” in the local audio cassette industry. *Ḍholā* recordings comprise over one half of the listings of companies with markets in rural western Uttar Pradesh.

A tripartite epic

Let me briefly summarize *Ḍholā* with reference to its oral and written history. While its singers refer to twenty or more *maidan* (fields) or *larai* (battles), historically and narratively it has three

major sections, each with a different oral and written history.

The first section tells the early history of Raja Nal, born to Raja Pratham of Narwargarh after a guru rewards Pratham for his devotion with one rice grain that will give him an heir. Before Nal's birth, his mother is banished to the forest, where she is befriended by a passing merchant. Nal grows to adulthood in the merchant's home unaware of his true origin. He meets and marries Motinī, raised as the daughter of a demon but in reality an exiled *apsara* from Indra's heavenly kingdom. Since Motinī is non-human, she cannot bear a child for Nal and eventually ascends to heaven, although her special powers allow her to intervene on Nal's behalf in his later adventures.

I have not found any connections with other oral or written materials for this part of the epic. I should note that the singers are unconcerned about the literary history of its various portions, referring to the whole as *Nal Purana* and call it "our Mahābhārata".

The second section in fact has its core episode drawn from the Mahābhārata. Here Nal meets and marries Damayantī, whose father wishes to have Indra as a son-in-law. But Damayantī, in the Ḍholā version, is in reality the incarnation of the daughter of Raja Vasuki, king of the snakes, and has taken birth as a human in order to win Nal's hand, after he rejects her in her father's kingdom. Indra, angered that Nal has won Damayantī, brings misfortune to his kingdom. Banished, Nal suffers leprosy, works as an oil presser, and has a son Ḍholā who is married while young to Mārū.

The broad outlines of this section are the same as those from the Nal-Damayantī story from the Mahābhārata, though many details are different. This portion clearly has a long written and oral history, in both Sanskrit and various vernaculars, in both north and south India.¹

The third section is the story of Ḍholā and his child-wife Mārū. Married while infants, Ḍholā and Mārū are separated. As a young adult, Mārū seeks her husband, but finds that he has a second wife who thwarts her efforts at union. Eventually with the aid of Motinī, Ḍholā and Mārū are united, only to end their lives by a mutual common drowning in the rising lake of Magdhotal. Thus ends the epic and the lineage of Raja Pratham.

This section of the epic has many correspondences to a Jain ballad called *Ḍholā-Mārū* from western Rajasthan whose most famous composition was written by a Jain poet in the sixteenth century. Many later versions of the Rajasthani *Ḍholā-Mārū*, including beautifully illustrated manuscripts, exist in collections in Rajasthan. Composed in medieval Rajasthani dialects, these ballads are still

¹ The Nal-Damayantī story is a popular episode in Kathakali performances in Kerala, and is found in a Tamil version as well as in north Indian dialects.

sung by Manganiyar musicians in the western desert regions. Other versions were and are performed by *khayal* (folk opera) troupes throughout Rajasthan since at least the early nineteenth century and some *khayal* scripts are also found in manuscript form.

The Rajasthani ballad is considered part of the medieval *lok khandakāvya* literature building on popular idioms and vernacular lyrics (Williams 1976: 104). The *khandakāvya* literature was a verse bound story, generally of one meter with interspersed folk songs, a style not unlike the *Ḍholā* considered here today. These Rajasthani literary versions of *Ḍholā-Mārū* can be seen as original compilations by given authors of lyrics and verses familiar to them or newly created following known metrical conventions. Most probably oral versions of *Ḍholā-Mārū* co-existed, as they do today, in the Braj region.

The history of the union of these three somewhat disparate parts remains unknown. But both the Rajasthani *Ḍholā-Mārū* and the Nal-Damayantī sections had a Raja Nal, giving them a totally fortuitous similarity. Further, both formed parts of the repertoires of local singing groups, where the fortuitous similarity of name was undoubtably noted.²

A Braj scholar, Ram Narayan Agrawal (personal communication), dates *Ḍholā* as we know it to the early nineteenth century when one Madari of village Lohvan near Mathura asked the Devi of Nagarkot for the boon of writing something which would make his name "immortal". After hearing the Rajasthani *Ḍholā-Mārū*, he wrote 360 stanzas, which he sang with *cikārā* and *ḍholak*. His disciples, Garhpati and Patbhal, made it popular throughout the Braj region.

The difference between written and oral performance

Certainly it was well-known in the latter part of the nineteenth century: Ram Swarup learned it 50 years ago and his guru, some 70 years at the time, must have learned it 50–60 years before that. These men represent a tradition of oral teaching: neither was literate. In addition, there is a written tradition, with two important versions – one by Gajadhar of Hathras District, who lived to be over 80 and died only in the early 1990s and the other by Matol Singh of Bharatpur, who died at age 62 in 1991. Both versions were published in Hathras by Deepchand Booksellers, who have let Gajadhar's version go out of print in favor of the newer rendition by Matol Singh. In 1994, the owners of Deepchand reported that Matol Singh's version remained

² Some of these matters are considered in Wadley 1983: 3–25. According to Grierson (1890), the Chattisgarhi version of *Ḍholā-Mārū* has a preliminary section on Raja Nal.

the most popular printed version, although perhaps a dozen other versions can be found today in various bookshops around the region. (Singh, M. n.d.; Singh, G. n.d.)

Matol Singh is the preeminent writer and performer of *Ḍholā* today and the subject of the rest of this paper. He is a Gujar landowner from the village Dhamari, near Kama in Bharatpur. His father had been a singer of *Ḍholā* and *bhajans*, and Matol initially learned from him. Later he took part in *jhikri* competitions, but came to hate the violence and threats associated with them. He also got a job as a government worker with the Water Board. In *Ḍholā* singing, he found what he sought – singing with no fights. He eventually started writing his own version, creating his own versification and melodic structures. He also researched his subject, visiting Narwar-garh (in Madhya Pradesh) and, so he says, Pingal in Rajasthan. He read other epics and folk materials, incorporating what seemed relevant into his version. Sometime in the 1950s he began publishing his version, one *maidan* (or part) at a time. First he rewrote the *maidans* current throughout the region – *Manjhā kā Nikāsā* (the banishment of Queen Manjhā), *Motinī kā Byāh* (the Marriage of Motinī), etc. He also added at least one *maidan* to the core corpus, *magdhotal*, the ending in which *Ḍholā* and *Mārū* are submerged by the rising lake. More recently he has been writing yet other episodes, unknown to the older oral tradition. In some rather primordial way Matol Singh represents the *process* of vernacular puranic creation as he attempts to create *the* definitive version of *Ḍholā*.

Yet there are vast discrepancies between his written and performed versions, discrepancies that point to a tension between oral and written performances that is fundamental to understanding Indian oral and written traditions. In a society where there is much debate about the prestige and authenticity to be accorded the written versus the oral text, understandings and decisions about what to commit to paper, and what not, lead us to greater understandings of written and oral traditions.

Two key factors differ as Matol Singh “performs” for an audience who reads his printed text and an audience that hears him sing. First, what is the context of transmission? How is the text conveyed, to whom, via what medium? Second, what are Matol Singh’s aesthetic goals in these two different settings? And what are the goals of judgment that he attributes to his two different audiences and how do these guide the texts that he thus creates in performance?

Let me briefly sketch some initial answers to these two questions. First, Matol is a student of poetic meters and in several instances has created his own meters, and the music to accompany them. Yet, like most *Ḍholā* singers he borrows heavily from the

song styles of the Braj region. His text, however, does differ from the earlier popular printed version of Gajadhar by relying less heavily on local genres and more on his own newly created styles. Furthermore, he enjoys playing what are best called verbal games: he proudly showed me one section where his name and village were incorporated into the text as the first letter of sequential lines. (Thinking of those scholars who pour over texts by long dead authors, and find such hidden codes, I appreciated Matol's ability to point out his games to me!) His written text also contains his philosophic statements about the world in which he lives, based on the *bhakti* religious system that he embraces. Finally, the written text has a minimal narrative thread. What is printed is the poetry. But in fact *Ḍholā* as performed is a combination of song and narrative, where the audience is continuously kept abreast of the story through narrative prose pauses. These are absent from the written text. In examining early *Ḍholā-Mārū* manuscripts in Rajasthan libraries, I found a similar deletion, but in many cases the narrative "links" were written in around the edges, clearly in a different hand and after the initial poetic text was created. Finally, Matol is constrained by the requirements of the printers: the pamphlets in which *Ḍholā* is produced generally have 24 or 28 pages and the publishers want a text that meets those constraints. Hence he must produce each episode in the required space, a constraint that earlier manuscript writers did not face, at least in the same way.³

The oral performance is a sung event. To be successful, it must be musically interesting as well as tell a good story. *Ḍholā* singers accompany themselves with either a *cikārā*, a two-stringed bowed instrument, or a harmonium or both. The lead singers in all the troupes with whom I have worked have played one of these two instruments. In one case a harmonium player provided additional accompaniment to the lead singer's *cikārā* while in the case of Matol Singh's troupe, his assistant plays the *cikārā* while he plays the harmonium. A *ḍholak* (drum) player is always present as well. Sometimes an additional player on either a tambourine or steel tongs is added. Hence an oral performance of *Ḍholā* is a group event and a musical event. Because the performance is judged musically, a good voice is necessary. And Matol Singh's voice is not of high quality. Hence he relies on two assistants with excellent voices for the key musical elements of his performance. Matol's troupe then consists of himself as lead singer and harmonium player, a second singer who also plays the *cikārā*, a third singer who also plays a tambourine-like instrument, and a drummer. Critically, Matol does not retain control over the texts and styles of his assistants. They have the

³ The role of audio cassettes, with a 60 minute frame, on oral productions is another related question that I have not yet examined.

option to be as creative as they like, using styles and texts either learned from other singers or composed on the spot. A strict adherence to predefined text is not maintained.

Further, humor dominates over philosophy. And it is essential that the audience be able to follow the narrative thread, which is told in prose sections interlinked with the sung portions. Let me give two examples: Matol's prime assistant is Harman, also a Gujar farmer. Harman is only in his mid-thirties and has a commanding presence. He is a skilled performer, and although Matol claims that Harman is not good at memorizing, his performance was compelling. I suspect that he is not good at memorizing Matol's verses, but is perfectly adept at what interests him. Moreover, Matol Singh is locked, as it were, behind his harmonium while Harman moves about, *cikārā* in hand as a kind of all purpose prop (he cradles it when talking about Nal's birth, waves it like a sword when Nal battles Phul Singh Panjabi, etc.).

The textual difference

This first example compares the part of the episode known as "Motinī's Wedding". This first piece is from the written version of Matol Singh as published by Deepchand Booksellers, Hathras, Uttar Pradesh.

In this segment, the young Raja Nal, raised in the trader's house and thinking that he is a trader by birth, is given his sacred thread ceremony. The *Banya* (trader), his foster-grandfather, calls the king, Raja Pratham, to the ceremony. Pratham of course does not know that this is his own son; only Manjhā knows the truth.

Raja Pratham came from Narwar, along with 200 soldiers. So many people, like a river of humanity. All the brave Rajputs sit with clever hearts. Chess is laid out in the bungalow and the Thakurs are playing. There is an abundance of dance, color, laughter, and jokes in Dakshinpur.

It is a tale of a time long ago.

The king held the hand of the Seth of Dakshinpur, "I am asking, please show us the son for whom you have arranged this function."

Hearing this, the Seth's heart was pleased,
As he went to Basmati [Manjhā's name in Dakshinpur],
"The court of the Raja of Narwar is very prestigious:
My sister, come with me,

The Raja of Narwar wishes to view the child
How can we refuse his request?
Kings, saints and hornets are not touched by clever people,
All are anxious to see the son..."

The Rani thought, "Whatever is written in my fate, that cannot
be negated."

...
The Seth took Banwari [Nal's name] and reached the court,
Seeing the son on his lap, all were transfixed,
Narwar's lord kept crying: "How can one understand fate?
If I was at Narwar today, I would give my whole treasury,
For a son like you today at Narwar...
No matter the number of rebirths,
There will be no wife like Manjhā,
Fate has caught me in its web,
Hear me, it is all a matter of fate,
Or the prince of Narwar would have remained,
Instead of growing each day in Dakshinpur,
But people are useless against fate..."

In this piece, Pratham clearly laments the fates that have not given him a son. Meanwhile, Manjhā is worried about showing her face, for then Pratham will recognize her. In the oral version, she is more creative in dealing with her potential recognition, while she also follows her wifely duties of not eating before her husband. The oral version comes from Matol's troupe's oral performance of the same segment of this epic (sung in December 1989 by Matol Singh and troupe in Jodhpur, Rajasthan; Wadley Collection Tape 89: 11).

So Raja Pratham came to Dakshinpur bringing 200 soldiers,
And was welcomed with much pomp and show,
And the Seth said: "Maharaj, this is our grandson, our daughter's son..."

And the Sethani said to Manjhā: "Daughter, eat, for we cannot.
Who knows how long the ceremony will be?"
She was a *pativrat* (a woman worshiping her husband) and could not eat until her husband had his food. Manjhā thought that,
"I say, I am not eating because of my husband, then they'll think badly of me."

So Manjhā said:

"Oh mother, I have taken a vow.
Oh mother, it is not yet noon.

Oh how can I eat and be righteous."
Then Manjhā ate only at one in the afternoon.

After the king ate, he said to the Seth: "Where is this child whose thread ceremony is today? Show me this nephew so that I may see his beauty." Hearing these words, the Seth rejoiced. Then the Raja said: "I'll reward you by taking him with me..."

Hearing this, Manjhā began to cry.
When queried, she replied:
"Why are the clouds laden?"

She thought, "How can I go to the court; all my relatives will be there. If Pratham sees the child and notices a likeness, then he will ask about it. My secret will be out and I'll be killed..."

In happiness the Seth brought the son to the Raja. Speaking his happiness at his sight, and seeing a bright future before him, the Raja was enraptured and in his happiness, he later wept:

"Oh, all my work is spoilt,
With one son like this in Narwar,
My name would continue,
But my name is submerged,
Oh god!"

He cried and tears poured from his eyes.
Durgā [a goddess] came on the roof, and the goddess spoke [mockingly]:

"Don't you feel bad?
He is the son of this father,
Why do you cuddle him in your lap?
You made your own leave,
Why do you repent?
At home your neighbors told lies,
And made a fool of you..."

Here, rather than the emphasis being on Raja Nal's lament about fate, we have the goddess mocking him because he himself caused the loss of his son.

The second snippet comes from the episode in which Raja Nal marries Motinī and in the absence of any parents, family, or friends, the goddesses provide for the wedding, with retinues, food, etc. Here Harman sings of the wedding procession and the foods

prepared for the feast. But it is not a completely solo performance, for the interaction between the several singers is a key element of the performance style.

Behmātā and Durgā came,
And Narad playing an instrument.
With banana leaves prepared a *mandap*,
The branches moving gently in the breeze,
Motinī will be a bride,
And the one from Narwar a groom,
Narad blessed both,
Listen, Govind my friend,
Matol of Dhamri is saying,
Motinī has completed circling the fire.

This is a remarkably unelaborated discussion of a marriage ceremony. The oral version is dramatically different:

Nal said: "Let's get married!"
Immediately Durgā came riding a lion,
And also Behmātā, thinking that Nal should marry now.
Narad came beating a drum,
And Narad Muni said:
"O daughter Motinī, what is the delay?
Marry him even if I must get the money from Indra."
And Motinī smiled.
But dowry is wrong in these times...

The Mantras for circling the fire were chanted by Narad,
Durgā sang the wedding songs...
Then from villages everywhere came [the marriage procession
of] the demons and witches,
Asking what have you cooked...
There are *puris* and *papads*,
Shakarapara even *lucchis* are there;
Other breads are served,
along with salty snacks [for the demons],
Khair and *rasgula*, twisted *jilebis*,
And *barfi* too;
Four kinds of *ladu*,
Petha, *balushiy*, *imaarti*, *gulabjamun*...
Curds, *khair* and sugar,
Rice with *methi*,
Dishes with lentils of *moong*, slightly sour,
And *masur* and *urd* too,

Chickpeas with vegetables –
eggplant, gourd, carrots, okra...

Behmātā climbed on the terrace as the procession of Nal came,
Now how did Behmātā sing abuse (*gālī*)!
She sang: "Oh, I do not know your caste,
All your men are too young..."

Here the marriage is described in minute detail, with vibrant rhythm and energy. This scene appeals to the village audiences, who know only too well the complications of weddings, the foods presented, and the abuse sung by women.

So the written text, as one kind of cultural product, and the oral event, as another kind of cultural product, produce two radically different "texts". The demands of context, the different audiences, the different goals of Matol Singh himself all work to produce texts that are dramatically different from each other. In one, philosophical arguments and strict adherence to meter and rhyme prevail, along with various verbal "games" played by the author, only with difficulty perceived by the acutely observant reader. In the other, music dominates, meter and rhyme are less important, humor dominates over philosophy, the narrative thread is fundamental, and the nature of verbal games changes from hidden codes to overt jesting.

As I reflect upon the many oral and written "texts" produced over the centuries in South Asia, the interplay between styles in these productions of Matol Singh leads me to conjectures about the goals of poet-authors such as Tulsīdās in composing the *Ramān-caritmanas*. He, too, undoubtedly performed: were his performances, like those of Matol Singh, radically different events?

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Epic and History

Mental Text, Landscape, Politics, and Written Codification: The Irish Epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge*

DORIS EDEL

The position of the Irish epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Cattle-Raid of Cooley; short: *Táin*) in Irish literature has been compared to that of the *Iliad* in Greek literature. Both works pose comparable scholarly problems (see Fig. 1). They differ, however, in the level of artistic perfection they reach. The *Táin* shows to a much greater extent the characteristics of the semiliterate epic: despite the written codification which took place, the story matter remained to a certain extent fluid.

Regarding the form, the tale is told in prose with verse interludes, whereby the burden of the narrative is carried by the prose, and emotional climaxes – prophecies, monologues and dialogues – are expressed in verse. The verse passages are partly stanzaic, with rhyme, and partly in an older form called *rosc*, which from a modern viewpoint is somewhere between poetry and prose. The question whether this use of narrative prose points back to the beginnings of Indo-European epic tradition,¹ or, to the contrary, is typical of a phase of decline of this tradition (Bowra 1952: 52), or again represents a borrowing from Christian Latin culture (at least as far as early medieval Ireland is concerned),² is still unanswered.

The plot and structure are on the whole very simple. The nucleus theme is an attack on Ulster by the rest of Ireland, and the episodes are strung together in a predominantly linear fashion.³ The content of the narrative is as follows:

The rulers of Connacht, Ailill and Medb, attack the northern kingdom of Ulster together with their allies Mide, Leinster and

¹ Windisch 1905: XLVIII f. Cf. Oldenburg 1903: 45.

² Greene 1969: 15 f., and very recently the medieval historian Donnchadh Ó Corráin (1994: 27).

³ There is one exception, the *Macgnímrada* (Boyhood Deeds) of Cú Chulainn, a flashback or in-tale in which Ailill and Medb are informed by the Ulster exiles about Cú Chulainn's heroic exploits as a small boy. This happens when their army is about to invade Ulster and had its first encounter with the youthful hero.

Munster. The aim is loot (cattle and other *mobilia*), not conquest, their destination the peninsula Cúailnge (Cooley) on the east coast (see Figs. 2 and 3). Among the invaders is the great Ulster hero Fergus with a company of Ulster exiles. As in times of great danger the Ulstermen are struck down by a weakness – the result of a curse – in the first part of the war Ulster's only defense is the adolescent boy Cú Chulainn. With guerrilla tactics and magical means he manages to manipulate the invaders into agreeing that each day one single combat will be fought between him and one of their warriors and that they will only proceed with their attack when their representative will be victorious. During the war Medb has a love relationship with Fergus which her husband tolerates. When finally the Ulstermen have recovered, a battle is fought between the two armies in which Ulster is victorious. The epic is concluded by a combat between two bulls, one from Ulster and one from Connacht. The Ulster bull kills the Connacht bull, but falls dead when he reaches his own land.

What exactly is part of the Táin proper?

This is one of the fundamental problems of the Táin research. Simplifying matters somewhat, it is possible to distinguish three different versions of the work, each preserved in more than one manuscript (see Fig. 4). These versions can be dated on linguistic grounds from the Old Irish period, which lasted to the early tenth century, to the fifteenth century. The manuscripts date from the eleventh to the nineteenth century.

Besides, there are two seventh-century poems with Táin-matter, each from one of the two enemy camps. While *Conailla Medb míchuru*, attributed to a poet from the southern half of Ireland, Luccreth moccu Chíara, has an anti-Ulster bias, the other, *Verba Scáthaige*, preserved in a manuscript with early Ulster matter,⁴ is definitely pro-Ulster.

To begin with the oldest version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, TBC I, this already is a composite affair (see Figs. 5 and 6).

The main body of the text, containing most of the story matter, is in Old Irish and was in all probability first redacted in writing in the ninth or early tenth century.

Within this "main text" is contained a section which is partly even older (eighth or possibly seventh century): *Córugud aile* (the Other Ordering). Presenting an alternative account of part of the

⁴ The *Cín Dromma Snechta* (*quinio* of Druim Snechta, now Drumsnat in Co. Monaghan), dated by the majority of scholars to the 8th century.

route of the invaders, this section tells of a love tryst by Medb and Fergus, during which the couple is spied upon by Ailill's charioteer. This is followed by a highly emotional conversation in *rosc*-style between the three protagonists. With its focus on the love triangle – which outside this “Other Ordering” becomes more and more marginalized in the Táin tradition – it recalls the seventh-century poem *Conailla Medb míchuru*, in which the love triangle functions as the trigger for the attack on Ulster.⁵

Furthermore, there are a number of eleventh-century additions, probably introduced by the scribes of the late-eleventh-century manuscript *Lebor na hUidre* (LU), the earliest manuscript containing the Táin which has been preserved (see again Fig. 4). These additions are not only later linguistically, but also stylistically, being all in the elaborate style which became fashionable after the Old Irish period. With one exception, the Fer Diad-episode, they belong to the categories descriptions and catalogues (*Breislech Mór*, *Cethern*, *Tochestol Ulad*, *Tochim na mBuiden*, *Tochestol Fér nÉrenn*⁶). The Fer Diad episode forms the climax of the series of single combats by Cú Chulainn against representatives of the enemy force (see the summary). In the Irish view, Fer Diad was Cú Chulainn's foster-brother, as the two heroes had received the highest grade of their heroic training or initiation together, viz. from the female warrior Scáthach, in distant lands across the sea; and for the Irish the fight between foster-brothers had the same emotional impact as the fight between brothers had elsewhere.

Finally, in the twelfth century, *Lebor na hUidre* underwent revision by a scribe referred to as H, who entered the so-called H-interpolations.

Regarding these eleventh and twelfth-century additions to the main text, although they do not add significantly to the narrative as such, they do add significantly to the length of the work. Without them the Táin would be about two fifths shorter.

Part of the problem what actually is part of the Táin proper is the question *where* the Táin *begins* and *where* it *ends*. While TBC I, the oldest version, plunges as it were *in medias res* with Ailill's and

⁵ While in the *Iliad* the hostilities are caused by the abduction of the wife of one of the Greek kings by a foreigner, viz. the Trojan hero Paris, in the earliest stratum of the Táin they are caused by the betrayal of Ulster by one of its leading heroes who is acting out of passion for a foreign queen, viz. Medb. However, as the history of the two works shows, in a heroic tradition the first of the two causes was easier to accept. For the marginalization of the love triangle in the Táin-tradition, see Edel 1993: 92–95, 98–99.

⁶ The ‘Battle of Breislech Mór’, ‘Cethern's Fights’, the ‘Muster of the Ulstermen’, the ‘March of the Companies’, and the ‘Muster of the Men of Ireland’ (of Connacht, Munster, Leinster and Mide; the inhabitants of Ulster not being part of the Men of Ireland according to the earlier tradition).

Medb's decision to invade Ulster, the twelfth-century TBC II, contained in the contemporary *Book of Leinster* (LL), provides an explanation for this decision in the so-called "Pillow Talk". In this highly amusing introductory tale, which, by the way, forms an excellent introduction to Old Irish marriage law, the royal couple argues which one of them wields most power. And not only the beginning, but also the end of the Táin is to a certain extent fluid. To limit myself to the oldest version, as its concluding part is only contained in one of the manuscripts, the *Yellow Book of Lecan* (YBL), which is about three hundred years younger than LU, it is not improbable that it belongs to a later phase of the tradition than the rest.

The fluidity of the Táin matter is further apparent in the references to variant traditions and in the contradictions, both categories especially numerous in TBC I. Moreover, as I have shown elsewhere, this fluidity even extends to the delineation of the characters of the protagonists, the most striking example being the figure of Fergus, who throughout the successive Táin-versions underwent a process of white-washing by which the traitor was turned into an exemplary hero (Edel 1992b, 1993).

Ernst Windisch, one of the leading Celticists and also a scholar of Sanskrit of great merit, who at the beginning of this century prepared the first edition of the Táin, gave the following characterization of the epic: "Der ganze Stoff blieb flüssig, vor Allem in der Sprache, aber auch in der Behandlung."⁷

As regards the stories which were integrated into the Táin, some of them continued to function as independent tales after becoming part of the epic (e.g., the Story of Fer Diad's Death), while others apparently ceased to do so. Remarkably, in one of the two twelfth-century tale-lists contained in the manuscripts, eleven episodes from the Táin are listed as independent tales and referred to by their respective titles, among them *Breislech Mór*, *Cethern*, *Tochestol Ulad*, *Tochim na mBuiden*, mentioned above (Mac Cana 1980: 87).

Besides these additions to the Táin, there existed a growing number of *remscéla* (preliminary tales), which the audience apparently had to know to be able to follow the narrative. In the course of time, a whole cycle of tales developed around the Táin, referring back to it, elaborating episodes and traits in it, etc. The development of this so-called Ulster cycle is best envisaged as a dynamic process – with the Táin, itself in a state of expansion, as its motor.

⁷ 1905: XLIX. For a Western European scholar of his time, this is an astonishingly modern view. It was probably his familiarity with the Indian material which kept him from making the mistake so many of his colleagues made, viz. to ignore the living epic tradition and to involuntarily transfer problems of purely literary criticism to the folk poetry of the ancients; cf. A. N. Veselovsky, as quoted in Chadwick & Zhirmunsky 1969: 319.

The dating of the Táin

Another fundamental problem is at what time the epic came into existence as an extended and coherent narrative. Scholars focusing on written culture – and they seem again to be growing in strength – are generally reluctant to go further back than the oldest preserved manuscript of a given text. In the case of the Táin this would mean that the work cannot be dated much earlier than the eleventh century. According to Hildegard Tristram, a representative of this school, the extended narrative only made its appearance in Ireland in the tenth or eleventh century under classical influence.⁸

Scholars agree that in general written redactions of extended narratives only come into existence through contact with a written culture “from outside”. This does not mean, however, that in oral tradition the *notion* of the extended narrative or extended epic is lacking. Although not fixed in writing, the extended epic exists, is known to all participants in the tradition; although “in an endless state of variation ... its key lines and main plot [are] always recognisable” (Honko 1989: 16–17). The extended form exists as a mental text (cf. pp. 74–77 in this volume).

It is an illuminating experience to participate in this congress, as for the student of the oral and semiliterary epic India is a true Land of Learning. Lauri Honko has pointed out in regard to South Indian epic traditions that “in real life epics are usually broken into short passages around some key events which correlate to the actual context of performance” (ibid.). It seems to me that medieval Irish epic tradition did not function much differently. The medieval Irish storyteller, while focusing in his performance on individual episodes or strings of episodes of the Táin, could do this in the firm knowledge that his audience was able to situate these episodes within the work as a whole. To quote another famous Celticist, Thurneysen (1921: 98), “Die Sage war jedermann so geläufig, daß man nur den Titel zu hören brauchte, um die ganze Lage vor Augen zu haben.” Moreover, also in medieval Ireland there may have been a link between the *context* and the *content* of the performance. Remarkably, in the two tale-lists mentioned above, the tales are classified according to key events in real life (Mac Cana 1980: 41–49, 52–63): *Catha* (Battles), *Tána* (Cattle-raids), *Fessa* (Feasts), *Echtra* (Adventures), *Immrama* (Sea-voyages), *Tochmarca* (Wooings), *Comperta* (Conceptions), *Aitheda* (Elopements), *Aideda* (Death-tales), etc. The question arises whether it is “therefore not likely that it was ‘Battles’ in particular that were related to kings about to embark upon war, that

⁸ Tristram 1988. In her view, the development was triggered by the 10th-century adaptations of the matter of Alexander and of the Trojan War in the Irish language. Remarkably, however, as narratives these adaptations are inferior to the Táin.

'Cattle-raids' were told before undertaking a cattle-raid, 'Voyages' on setting out to sea, 'Conceptions and Births' at births, 'Wooings' at weddings, 'Death Tales' at wakes, and so on?" (Rees & Rees 1961: 209–10).

It takes a person who has thoroughly undergone the influence of written culture to feel the urge to fix in writing this orally functioning extended narrative. Whether this person comes "from outside" or from "within" the tradition, is not so important – what is important, is that he or she has (acquired) the attitude of the collector/compiler. As, however, in a living epic tradition the collector or compiler represents a secondary element, in all probability the Táin existed as *oral* extended narrative both *before* and *after* the oldest written redaction was made.

What factors lent stability to the Táin?

Assuming that the Táin functioned as oral extended epic, what factors lent stability to the loosely knit narrative? With regard to the extended epic, Hildegard Tristram distinguishes two types: a more sophisticated type with true narrative integration and a hierarchic plot structure, and a more primitive type which simply strings short episodes together to form a plot of linear succession (1988: 21). Now, although the Táin to a certain extent has a hierarchic plot structure – with the military expedition as organizing element – and although the flashback on Cú Chulainn's "Boyhood Deeds"⁹ points to a considerable level of narrative sophistication, nevertheless the Irish epic may quite safely be regarded as belonging to the second type.

One of the main stabilizing factors is the *geography* of the epic (Edel 1992a). As much of the action is situated in places which can be identified with existing place names, it is possible to follow the route of the invaders from Connacht to the eastern seaboard and back again on modern maps (see again Fig. 3). I shall give a few examples. The mustering of the invasion forces takes place at the royal seat of Connacht, Crúachain Aí; modern name Rathcroghan in Co. Roscommon. One of the first nights is spent in Mag Trega; modern name Moytra in Co. Longford. In Cúil Sibrille, glossed Cenannas (Kells) in the earliest manuscripts, the invaders receive vital information about the foremost defender of Ulster, Cú Chulainn, by being told his *Macgnímrada* (Boyhood Deeds). Cúailnge, the name of the peninsula where the actual cattle-raid is to be held, is preserved in the name Cooley Point, as the tip of the peninsula is called today. Smiommair (Bath of Marrow; modern Smarmore in Co. Louth) is the place where Cethern, one of the Ulster heroes, after having been

⁹ See above, note 3.

badly wounded, is cured by a marrow-mash made from cattle-bones. At Slemain Midi, modern Slane in Co. Meath, the Ulster warriors hold their muster for the final battle in which they defeat Connacht. At Áth Lúain, modern Athlone, the invaders retreat across the Shannon into Connacht.

In addition to the explicit naming of places of action in the course of the narrative, in an introductory part called *Titulrad* a catalogue of more than sixty place names is given, which the army will have to pass on its route to Cooley.¹⁰

In insular Celtic learning, place-lore – for which the technical term is *dinnshenchas* – was held in very high esteem. As place names were seen as derived from events in the past, the (linguistic) analysis of a given place name was thought to yield information about the history of the place. If the name could be analyzed in more than one way, this was not held to be contradictory, but was taken to mean that the name contained information about more than one event in the past.

A substantial part of the place names in the Táin are explained as being derived from events occurring in the course of the epic. I shall give two examples of place names which are still part of modern toponymy, and then two of place names which are not.

To begin with the first category, at Focherd (modern Faughart in Co. Louth), Cú Chulainn kills the Connacht warrior Fer Báeth by throwing a holly shoot after him which makes the fatally wounded hero exclaim the words *Focherd sin ém!* (This is indeed a throw!). At Áth Fhir Diad (The Ford of Fer Diad; modern Ardee in Co. Louth), in what forms the climax of the series of single combats, Cú Chulainn kills his foster-brother Fer Diad. In Irish tradition, duels are often fought at river fords (cf. p. 165 above).

As to the second category, although these place names do not live on in modern toponymy, in many cases the relation with the landscape is evident. Thus Bernas Bó Cúailnge (The Gap [made] by the cattle of Cooley) is a very fitting name for an impressive feature of the landscape in this particular part of the route of the invading army, as anybody crossing the peninsula in that particular section can see. Another example is Fúal Medba (Medb's Urine), three enormous trenches (plus connected dykes) created by Medb when she has to urinate at the moment she is finally overtaken by Cú Chulainn.¹¹

To return to the question what gave stability to the plot of the Táin (taking into account the fluidity of the tradition) – and by plot

¹⁰ This seems influenced by written Christian-Latin culture, the list of place names calling to mind a similar catalogue in the Old Testament, Numbers c. 33 (the list of the places which the people of Israel had to pass on their way from Egypt to Canaan).

¹¹ This episode is an addition by the redactor of TBC II. As it refers to less spectacular features in the landscape than Bernas Bó Cúailnge, it is less easy to identify.

the entire sequence of events is meant, including much of the dialogues, utterances, witty repartees, etc. – apparently the tradition-bearers, by projecting their historical (and prehistorical) lore onto the land, were able to use both the features of the landscape and the toponymy as a kind of memory prop. As in their performance they brought the text to life on a human level, thus in their view the land could bring the text to life and keep it alive on a cosmological level.

What factors held interest in the Táin alive?

Finally, assuming that the Táin existed as oral extended epic – and taking into account that an oral tradition discards (has to discard) what no longer appeals to the audience – what factors kept interest in the Táin matter alive throughout the centuries?¹² The answer is that both the method of warfare (the cattle-raid) and the historical antagonism (Ulster versus the rest of Ireland) remained relevant.

Let us begin with the method, cattle-raiding. The cattle-raid is not only an important literary theme in a great number of epic traditions (including early Indian tradition), but also a common form of warfare wherever economies function at subsistence level. (In all probability the former is a result of the latter.) Now, Ireland was one of the regions with a subsistence economy until fairly recent times, and so it need not surprise that the cattle-raid was the dominant form of warfare in the Irish speaking parts of the island until the consolidation of the English power around 1600. The Irish technical term for this despoiling of a region is *crech*, a word which appears with great frequency in the Irish annals.¹³ In power politics, the *crech* was used to demonstrate the invader's supremacy over the invaded party. Famous historical examples are the *crechs* undertaken by the great twelfth-century warrior king Turlough O'Connor, who thus tried to become king over the whole of Ireland (see Fig. 7),¹⁴ and the *crechs* undertaken by Red Hugh O'Donnell in the decade before 1600, to establish himself as one of the last resistance leaders against the English (see Fig. 8).¹⁵

One look at the map of Turlough O'Connor's *crechs* is sufficient to show that throughout his long martial career he apparently never

¹² In fact, this question also arises in regard to the manuscript tradition of the Táin, which lasted into the 19th century.

¹³ Cf. Lucas 1989: esp. ch. 5. He begins this chapter on cattle-raiding by stating that "nothing in Irish society is better documented over so long a period. It is the most typical and abiding event recorded in the annals down the centuries and it pervades every branch of Irish literature."

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 197ff. The development towards a "national" monarchy was thwarted by the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in 1169.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 156ff., 165ff., 195f.

dared to attack Ulster. This brings me to the second aspect, the historical antagonism between this northern part and the rest of the island. Recent research into Irish prehistory has made it clear that this antagonism goes back a long way. Almost certainly its deeper cause are the natural barriers between the two parts of the island. Not only were the two halves celticized along different routes, the La Tène-Celts of the northern half arriving via northern Britain, the non-La Tène-Celts of the southern half arriving directly from the continent (including Spain),¹⁶ but apparently they were also Christianized along different routes, the southern half by Palladius, who came from Gaul, the northern half by Patrick, who arrived from Britain.¹⁷ Thereupon early Christian Ireland witnessed the emergence of a powerful new dynasty originating from Connacht and the midlands, the O'Neill dynasty, which for centuries threatened the very existence of the old kingdom of Ulster, reducing it to the area east of the river Bann. And finally, after Ulster had come completely under O'Neill authority, as just mentioned, the Ulster O'Neill king was the only serious rival of the other Irish kings on their way to "national" power. In fact, this northern part of the island has remained a special case until our own days.

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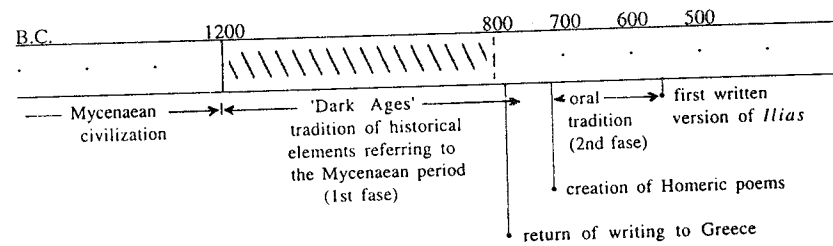
¹⁶ Cf. Caulfield 1981, Raftery 1994: 227–28.

¹⁷ Cf. Binchy's seminal article of 1962. Not unexpectedly, the Irish Catholic Hierarchy has a certain reluctance to accept the idea of two independent missions.

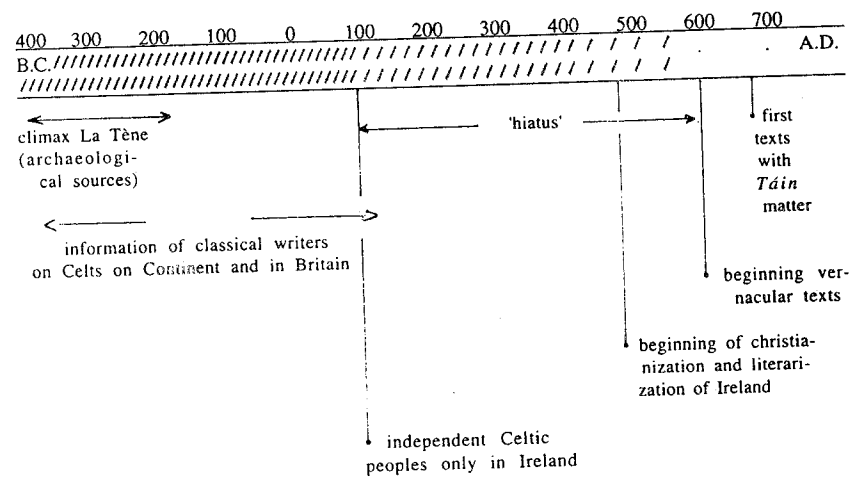
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Fig. 1

Historical background of *Ilias*



Historical background of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*



////////// La Tène civilization on Continent and in Britain
 //////////

////////// La Tène civilization living on in Ireland
 //////////

Fig. 2 The Ireland of the Táin



Fig. 3 The Route of the Táin

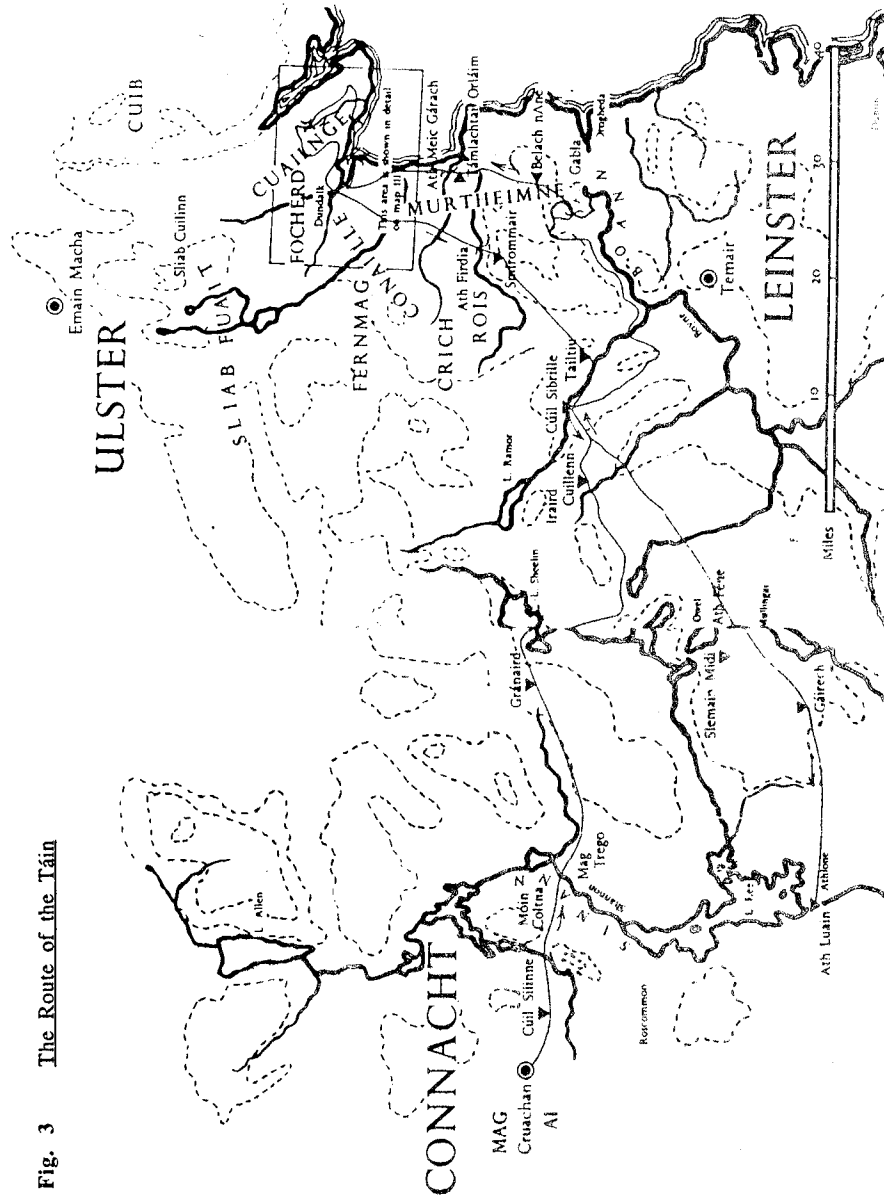
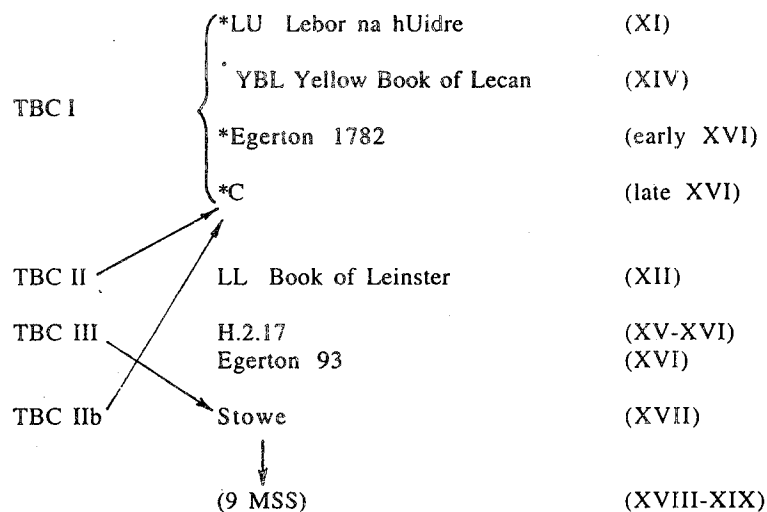


Fig. 4 Survey of versions and manuscripts of the Táin

*containing the H-interpolations

Fig. 5 Various strata TBC I

Conailla Medb mífchuru Verba Scáthaige	(VII)
Córugud aile (rosca)	(VIII)
'Main text'	(IX-X)
Breislech Mór, Fer Diad, Cethern, Tochestol Ulad, Tochim na mBuiden, Tochestol Fer nÉrenn	(XI)
H-interpolations	(XII)
[later recensions]	

Fig. 6

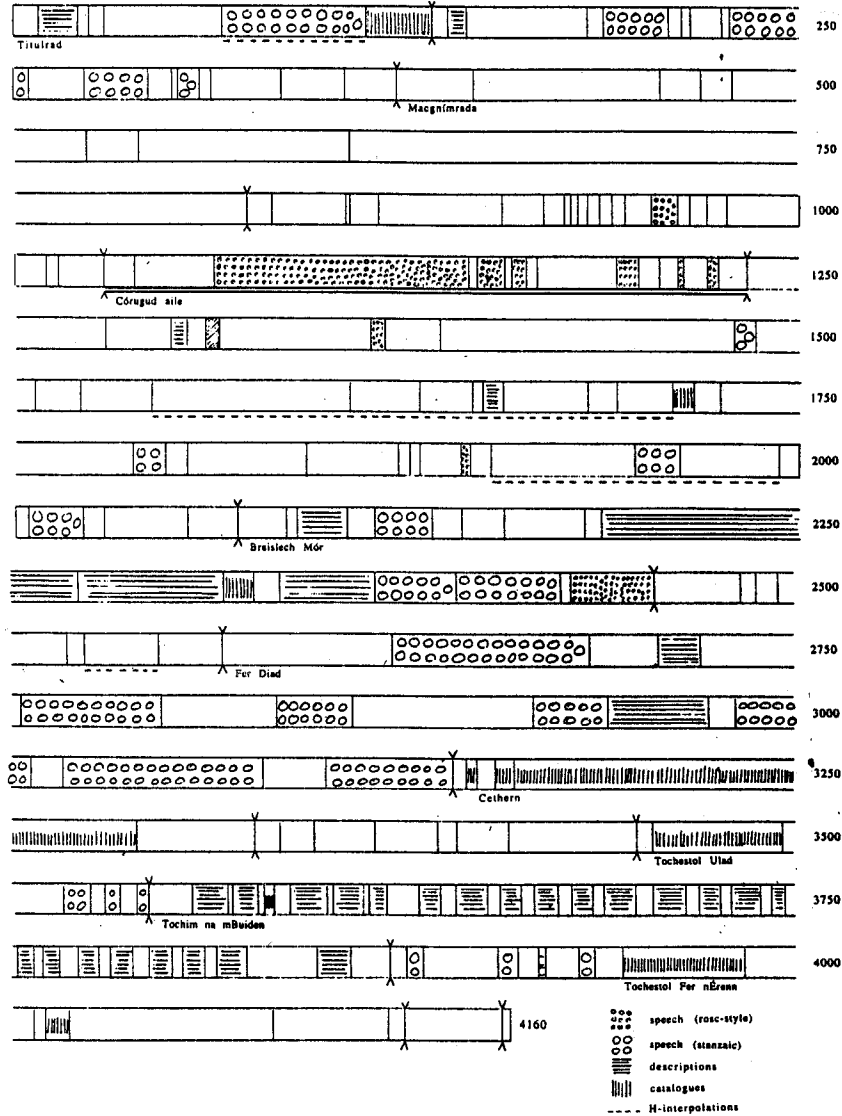
The structure of the *Táin* (TBC I)

Fig. 7 Crechs undertaken by Turlough O'Connor
from 1111 to 1154

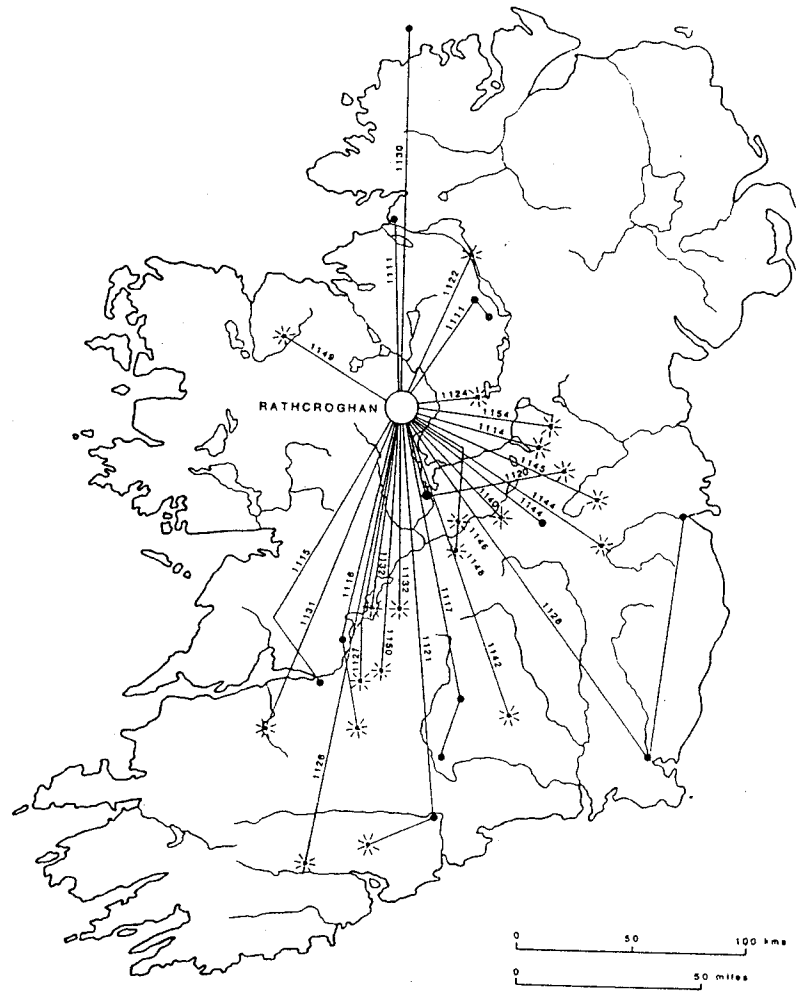
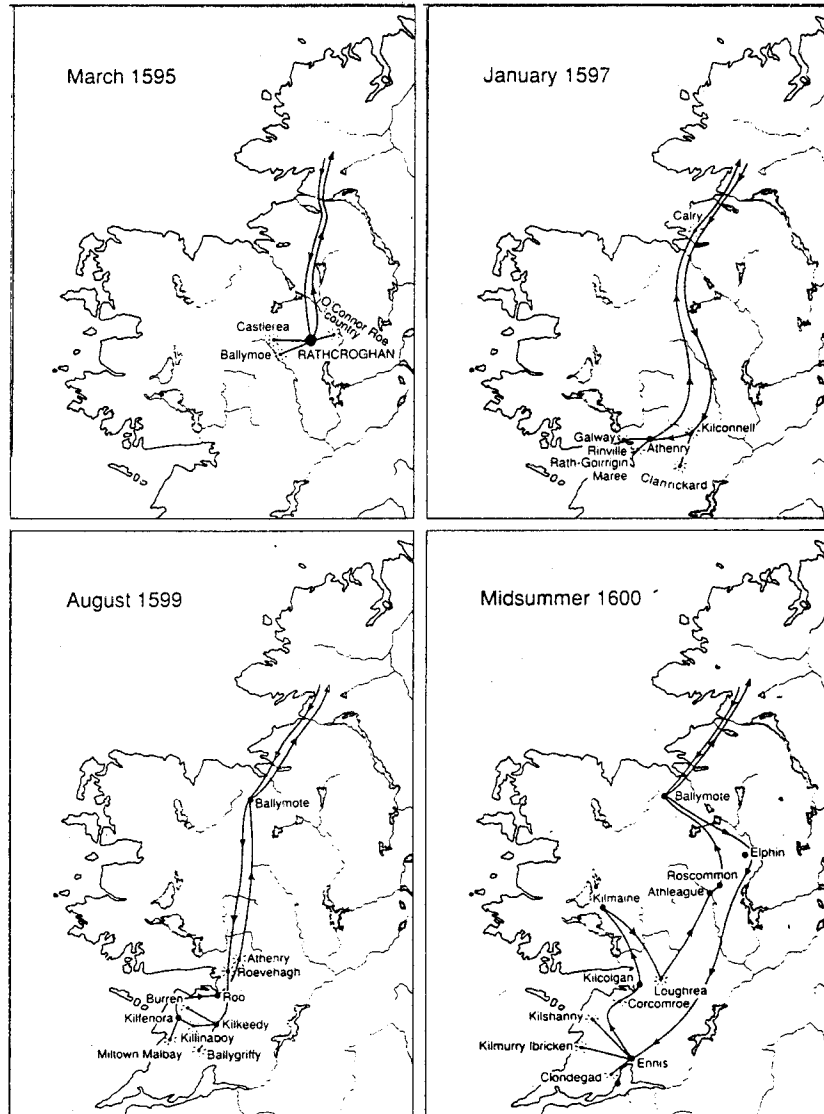


Fig. 8 Red Hugh O'Donnell's four major crechs undertaken from 1595 to 1600



"Alaro Ataoja Osogbo": A Yoruba Palace Historian

ISAAC OLAWALE ALBERT

Osogbo, the capital of Osun State, is one of the prominent citadels of Yoruba cultural heritage in Nigeria. As the leading domain of the Osun goddess, the city is annually visited by thousands of tourists from many parts of the world. The important attraction for the visiting tourists is the annual Osun festival held during the month of August. Osogbo is headed by a paramount ruler (*oba*) known as Ataoja. Towards fulfilling his many social, religious and political functions, the Ataoja keeps as part of his personal staff an oral-tradition performer popularly known as *Alaro Ataoja Osogbo*. The "traditional ruler" (*oba*) also keeps within the palace a team of drummers (*onilu*) and gourd-rattle beaters (*onisekere*). They entertain visitors coming to the palace. The most prominent artist in the palace, however, is the Alaro. During the many rituals, festivals and celebrations in Osogbo, the Alaro officially chants the histories of the past heroes, heroines, and gods of Osogbo. He is the official custodian of the kingdom's historical past. The performance of the Alaro readily reminds one of the similar performance of the griots found in some West African states like Mali, Guinea, Cote D'Ivoire, Senegal, etc. It was from one of these griots (Mamadou Kouyate) that the popular Sundiata epic of the Old Mali was recorded by D. T. Niane. The work was translated from French to English by G. D. Pickett. (See Niane 1960.) Since then, the Sundiata epic has attracted the attention of many Western scholars as well as their colleagues in the West African sub-region.

Unlike the case of the "obscure griot from the village of Djeliba Koro in the circumscription of Sigui in Guinea" from whom the Sundiata epic was recorded by Niane, not much is known about the creations of the Alaro Ataoja in Osogbo. However, more research is available about the *Arokin* in the Alaafin's palace in Oyo (de Moraes Farias 1990: 109-16). Though many scholars have interviewed and collected historical data from the present Alaro Ataoja Osogbo, the voice of the artist is not in any manner heard in the publications that resulted from such academic projects. The

epic stories of the Alaro might not be as long as those of the Malian griot but both seem to perform the same functions. My present aim is to attract scholarly attention to the Alaro Ataoja, especially to his personality, training and the nature of his performance.

The City of Osogbo

The story of how the city of Osogbo was founded is one of the most popularly known in Yorubaland. This is probably because of the annual Osun Osogbo festival, which makes expedient the public chanting of various poems related to the city's historical past. There are also various enactment ceremonies and rituals in the city, within the Ataoja's palace and beside the Osun river that remind the people of the historical antecedents of Osogbo. There are, however, many versions of the city's traditions of origin.

A version that has been popularized by Deji Olugunna (1959) claims, like the others, that Olaro-Oye, who founded Osogbo, descended from Owa Ajibogun of Ilesa. As a prince, he was appointed as the *oba* of Ipole, an Ijesa settlement not far away from Ilesa. At one point in the reign of Olaro-oye, Ipole was devastated by the problem of water supply. In order to solve the problem, Olaro-Oye sent out some hunters under the leadership of his brother Timehin to explore new sources of water supply in the forest. The hunters discovered a new site to which Olaro-Oye and his subjects later moved. This new settlement was named Ohuntoto, after Olaro-Oye's mother. Not long after settling in Ohuntoto, Olaro-Oye and his people were once again confronted by the problem of water shortage. Timehin and his fellow hunter-explorers had to be sent out again to find a new homeland for the people. It was during this second expedition that Timehin and his team discovered the Osun river. They shot an elephant that was seen beside the river and had it tied to a tree. For this feat, the offspring of Timehin are today praised as "Omo amerin wa wo'lu Osogbo" (the offspring of one who dragged an elephant into the city of Osogbo). Timehin had to go back to Ohuntoto to invite Olaro-Oye and his subjects to come and inhabit the new settlement beside the Osun river.

As soon as the rainy season arrived, the settlers were displaced from their new home by floods. It was concluded that the river gods were not pleased with the settlers and their new settlement. The oracles were consulted and the necessary sacrifices were made at the spot where Timehin had earlier killed an elephant. This marked the beginning of the Osun festival, which is even today celebrated with much pomp and pageantry in Osogbo.

To indicate that the sacrifices offered to the Osun goddess had been accepted, a god-fish Iko emerged from the river. The king Olaro-Oye welcomed the fish with spread hands. He thereafter became known officially as *Atẹwọ gbẹja* (i.e., One who welcomes the god-fish with spread hands). It is *Atẹwọ gbẹja* that was shortened to *Ataoja*, the present title of the traditional ruler (*oba*) of Osogbo. After the sacrifices, the Osogbo people settled some few metres away from the Osun river.¹ Because the settlers specialized in the preparation and sale of *egbo* (a special Yoruba porridge made of corn), their settlement became known as *Ise-gbo*. This later contracted to become *Osogbo*. Since the reign of Olaro-Oye, there have been fifteen *Ataojas* in Osogbo.

The above folk narratives suggest that Osogbo is an Ijesa settlement since Olaro-Oye and Timehin, who played active parts in founding it, issued from Ijesaland (Ilesa and Ipole). The settlement is, however, Oyo-speaking today. The changes occurred in the early nineteenth century,² although, according to Reverend Samuel Johnson in his *History of the Yorubas*, Osogbo was founded around the seventeenth century (Johnson 1921: 156). The Fulani Jihad, which started in Sokoto in 1804 under the leadership of Usman Dan Fodio, struck the Old Oyo empire around 1830s. As a result, Oyo-Ile (the Old Oyo) was destroyed. So also were some important Oyo settlements like Ikoyi, Offa and Erin.³ Some of the refugees fleeing from the Islamic fundamentalists settled in Osogbo. Around 1838, Osogbo itself was attacked by the Jihadists but their incursion into the city was repulsed by the Oyo army drawn from Ibadan. Many of the soldiers who came to fight the Fulani Jihadists eventually settled permanently in Osogbo, thus swelling the town's population. By the mid-nineteenth century, the population of Oyo-speaking people in Osogbo had grown far more than that of the Ijesa and so the cultural patterns in the city became Oyo dominated. (Olugunna 1959: 25, 28.)

The Alaro in Osogbo

In discussing the office of Alaro Ataoja in Osogbo it is necessary to

¹ Another version of the Osogbo traditions of origin, supplied by Y. Adegbite of the Mogba Compound in Osogbo, states that it was the Osun goddess who instructed the settlers to settle down at a considerable distance from the Osun river, so that she would not be disturbed. According to this version, it was at this time that the Osun goddess "signed" a pact with the Osogbo people, who from then on have offered annual sacrifices to her.

² See Beier 1975: 18; see also Schwab 1952.

³ For more information, see Law 1977: 245-99.

briefly refer to the similar institution of *Arokin* in Oyo, partly for the reasons stated in my above discussion. The *Arokin*, as noted by one writer, "are a hereditary corporation of male musicians who are praise singers and oral tradition specialists to the *Alaafin*" of Oyo (de Moraes Farias 1990: 112–13). Samuel Johnson, who collected some of the data used in writing his classic *History of the Yorubas* from the *Arokin* in Oyo, described them as "the national historians" of the Yoruba nation. By their different performances, they render accounts of the past. Every *Alaafin* since the period preceding the collapse of the Old Oyo keeps an *Arokin* in the palace to remind him of the past deeds of his ancestors and also to praise his own exalted position of *Obaship*. The *Arokin* is unique to the *Alaafin's* palace in Oyo as the *Alaro* is to the *Ataoja's* palace in *Osogbo*. The two of them are official oral singers of great importance.

My main focus in this paper is on the *Alaro Ataoja* of *Osogbo*. Let me therefore begin by stating that the *aro* (praise-singing accompanied with a metal clavi-chord) is a hereditary profession in *Osogbo*. The members of the *Alaro* family perform for the public. But the *Alaro Ataoja* performs primarily for royalty, although he may also perform for the public sometimes.

The *Alaro Ataoja*, like his colleagues, is a specialist in oral traditions. He knows the history of many past kings within their kingdoms and outside them. He knows why certain kingdoms, royal fathers, deities, etc., were given certain names. The Guinean griot, Djeli Mamoudou Kouyate, from whom Niane recorded the *Sundiata* epic of the Old Mali empire, was merely stating the credentials of his colleagues (the *Alaro* inclusive) in the West African sub-region when he said:

We are vessels of speech, we are the repositories which harbour secrets many centuries old. The art of eloquence has no secrets for us; without us the names of kings would vanish into oblivion, we are the memory of mankind; by the spoken word we bring to life the deeds and exploits of kings for younger generations... history holds no mystery for us. (Niane 1960: 1.)

The griots such as the *Alaro* in *Osogbo* and the *Arokin* in Oyo preserved in their memory the exploits of past kings, the constitutions of kingdoms and the precepts aimed at the young. Through their eloquence and musical art they were able to reproduce important past events.

In Yorubaland, the *Alaro* acquires his professional name because of the instrument he used in his trade. Generally speaking, a Yoruba chanter had three choices when performing. He could per-

form his chants without accompanying himself with any musical instrument. He could also accompany his historical poems or chants using a gourd rattle (*sekere*). This type of performer is known as Alusekere, Onisekere, or Alaje. The chanter who uses a metal clavichord (*aro*) in his performance is known as Alaro. Though both Alusekere and the Alaro perform in a similar manner, the instruments that accompany their performances differ. (See Aki-nyemi 1993.) The Alusekere and Alaro are most popular in the Oyo-speaking parts of Yorubaland – Oyo, Oke-Ogun area, Ibadan, Ibarapa area, Ilorin, Oyun, Igbomina, Origbo areas, Osogbo, etc. In all these place, the chanters who perform for the traditional rulers are collectively referred to as Akigbe Oḡa (the royal chanters or bards).

The palace chanters in Oyo (Arokin) use both the *aro* (metal clavichord) and *sekere* (gourd rattles) in their performances. P. F. de Moraes Farias interviewed a team of Arokin in the Alaafin's palace in Oyo in 1988. The Arokin team studied consisted of fifteen Alusekere accompanied by four child apprentices and four Alaro. De Moraes Farias' research did show that the Arokin in Oyo consisted of both the Onisekere and Alaro. He did, however, observe that most of the data made available to him were collected from Onaa Alaro (i.e., the head of the Alaro) although, as he noted at the same time, the head Arokin was an Onisekere. (de Moraes Farias 1990: 116.)

In Osogbo, most of the Alaro belong to the Akolodo family of the Isale Osun quarters. They perform using both the *aro* and *sekere* combined. This is due to the close affiliation of the Akolodo's family with the Oyo kingdom. Details of this will be highlighted in the subsequent discussion.

The palace historian

The current Alaro Atajo Osogbo is Mr. Popoola Ajani Akolodo. He is aged between 70 and 75 years. He is the head of the Akolodo family of Isale Osun area in Osogbo. A large Akolodo family can consist of up to seven households. Popoola Ajani Akolodo heads one such household. He believes in and practises polygamy and is a traditional religious man who would not commit the sacrilege of having his many children counted by an outsider. In all, he should, however, have no less than ten children and probably a household of fifteen, cared for by his earnings made from praise-singing.

The need to study Popoola Ajani Akolodo was first felt on February 23, 1990, when the Ataoja of Osogbo, Oba Iyiola Matanmi, was interviewed in connection with the composite project on the

city of Osogbo sponsored by the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. After a long session of interviews with the royal father, he invited the Alaro Ataoja to render the long *oriki* (praise songs) of Osogbo and its historic figures. For about four hours, the Alaro carried out the assignment to the admiration of all the people present. He was carefully interviewed the following day about the nature of his profession. My interest in the Alaro increased after participating in the second Folklore Fellows' Summer School at Turku, Finland. The motivation to continue research on the Alaro and his types scattered all over Yorubaland in Nigeria was inspired by the research on epics coordinated by Professor Lauri Honko of the Folklore Fellows, Finland. Therefore, the Alaro was invited to the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, on January 26, 1994 and interviewed once again. The second round of interviews was conducted to confirm and update some of the data earlier gathered from the Alaro Ataoja.

Popoola Akolodo is descended from the royal family of Olugbeise in Offa, Kwara State. He is descended from the family through his forefather, Lafenwa, who left Offa in annoyance for Osogbo when he was denied the opportunity of ascending the throne of his forefathers. He settled with Oba Matanmi I of Osogbo. Matanmi I ruled in the nineteenth century, suggesting that Lafenwa was one of the immigrants that came to settle in Osogbo after the Fulani invasion of their homelands. He probably chose to settle with Oba Matanmi because of the latter's affiliation with the Offa people. Oba Matanmi's wife came from Offa according to the accounts of Olugunna (1959: 19). As soon as Lafenwa, who specialized in *aro* trade, settled in Osogbo, he married an Oyo woman whose parents were *onisekere*.⁴ The first child the woman gave birth to, it would seem, somehow decided to take the *sekere* profession. Thus both *aro* and *sekere* professions got combined and were passed on to others including Ajao, Omideyi, Omiyale, Omidoyin, Bello, etc. The many children produced by all these people now dominate the *aro* profession in Osogbo.

Popoola Akolodo received training in the *aro* and *sekere* profession by watching his father and elder brothers perform. As soon as a child is born into the Akolodo family, a gourd rattle (*sekere*) is made for him. This involves the weaving of beads round the outer parts of a gourd.⁵ As the child begins to crawl, he is encour-

⁴ According to many *onisekere* who were interviewed, the *sekere* profession started in the Alaafin's palace in Yorubaland.

⁵ Though the Alaro make *sekere* by themselves in Osogbo, they normally travel to Oyo and Iseyin in Oyo state to buy their *aro*. Two families are most prominent in Oyo for the manufacturing of *aro*. These are the Oluwo and Olusami families. When any Alaro in Osogbo therefore needs an *aro*, he would travel to either Oyo or Iseyin to acquire it.

aged to roll the *sekere* from one place to the other, producing playful sound. The child soon learns to appreciate the importance of the *sekere*. As he begins to walk around, he learns to take the *sekere* along with him and gradually becomes a master in playing it to the accompaniment of musical notes. As soon as the child is about five years old, he begins to "escort" his father to places where performances are given. As the father chants, the child looks at his mouth and studies carefully the time the metal clavichord is to be played to accompany the chants or the occasional musical tunes rendered to support them.

Popoola Ajani began to go out on private performance when he was nine years old. That was in the 1920s or 1930s, when the British colonial administrators were just establishing their effective presence in Osogbo. Osogbo was at this time no more than a village. Popoola's praise-singing at this time was focused on private individuals, who in return gave him locust beans (*iru*), pepper (*ata*), onions (*alubosa*), etc. At the age of 25, he acquired his own metal clavichord having become a "master of words". He started performing for the Oba Matanmi family when the present Ataoja, Oba Iyiola Matanmi, was still in school. This was during the reign of Oba Adenle (1944–73). When Oba Iyiola Matanmi became the Ataoja in 1974, Popoola Ajani was automatically appointed as the Alaro Ataoja, with the consent of all members of the Akolodo family. Every Ataoja has the right to choose whosoever he likes as his Alaro, but such a person has to be chosen from the Akolodo family, who are known to own the profession in Osogbo.

In the past, the head of the Alaro family (usually the eldest person) used to live near the Osun river. He was in charge of all the performing groups in the palace. Due to the increasing need for specialization within the palace, the drummers were separated from the Alaro. The eldest person in the Alaro family usually took the title of Baale Onisekere (the head of Onisekere) in Osogbo. The office was formerly occupied by Sanni. Since his death, Popoola Ajani has been heading the family though he has not been formally appointed as a Baale.

The major function of Popoola Ajani Akolodo in the palace is to sing the praise of the incumbent and the past Ataoja, especially during important traditional festivals. On ordinary weekdays he is expected to be in the palace on Fridays – a day considered by the Muslim-dominated Osogbo people to be very important. On a typical Friday, the Alaro arrives at the palace at around 8 a.m. and he never leaves for home until about 4 p.m., when the Ataoja might have completed the reception of his various guests. The Alaro is expected to continuously sing the praises of his patron, his ancestors, and the guests that visit the Ataoja. The period when

the energy of the Alaro is most taxed is during the Osun festival. The festival is celebrated for seven days during the month of August every year. Throughout the seven days, the Alaro has to be with the Ataoja. On Ojọ Ifa (Ifa day) the Alaro has to be with the Ataoja. During the Ojọ Olojumerindinlogun, Ojọ isiyere and Ojọ agbe ayaba the Alaro must stay in the palace for one day each for these festivals. There is a special day when all the wooden carvings representing different gods, goddesses and deities in Osogbo are brought out in the open and offered sacrifices. On this day, the Alaro has to be around to render the appropriate chants for the many gods represented.

The performance of the Alaro is most colorful and exhaustive during the annual Osun festival. On this day, the people of this city from different parts of Nigeria have to return home to participate in the festival of the Osun goddess who, apart from serving as the unifying factor for both the Christians and Muslims in the city, is believed to have the power of fertility. The latter attribute of the Osun goddess is attested to by her *oriki* (praise-song):

We call her and she replies with wisdom.
She can cure those whom the doctor has failed.
She cures the sick with cold water.
When she cures the child, she does not charge the father.
We can remain in the world without fear.
Iyalode who cures children – help me to have my own child.
Her medicines are free – she feeds honey to the children.
She is rich and her words are sweet,
Large forests with plenty of good.
Let a child embrace my body.
The touch of a child's hand is sweet.

Women wishing to have children are usually the most numerous visitors to Osogbo during the Osun festival, which is attended by Osun devotees from different parts of Yorubaland. As soon as those officially invited to the Ataoja's palace have taken their seats amidst the lesser chiefs of Osogbo holding different traditional titles, the royal father (Ataoja) would emerge from his inner chamber to take his seat. The participants would take their traditional positions for the commencement of the Osun rituals. After consulting the gods about the proceedings of the day and after receiving the positive reply for the king to carry on, the Alaro is invited to come forward to begin his performance. He has to begin by rendering the *oriki* (praise-names) of the Osun goddess. The fifteen Ataojas who ruled Osogbo are then praised one after the other, starting with Olaro-Oye – the first king. The *oriki* of the other Ataojas are

then rendered in the following order: Sogbo, Aina Serebu, Lahanmi Oyipi, Ojo Okoge, Matanmi I, Fabode, Bamgbola, Oyetona Alomilagba, Olugbeja, Latona I, Kolawole, Latona II, Oyedokun Adenle, Iyiola Matanmi. The *oriki* of the fifteen Ataojas are different from one another. The praise songs contain historical information about the exploits, qualities and achievements of each.

Discussing the importance of such performances in the Yoruba socio-cultural system, Babalola (1966: 24) observed that "the reciting or chanting of the appropriate *oriki* in honour of the ancestors of a particular family causes members of that family who hear the performance to feel proud of their pedigree". The purpose of the *oriki* rendered during the Osun festival is to remind the Osogbo people of their historical past: what their past rulers have contributed to the growth and development of the city, and why the incumbent Ataoja has to follow in the footsteps of his forebears by keeping alive traditional festivities like the Odun Osun Osogbo.

As the *oriki* is chanted, honey, palmwine and palmoil have to be poured on the floor to appease the spirits and gods referred to in the songs. While some of the spirits are known to favor honey, others favor palmoil or palmwine. Therefore, each is appeased by the food he loved most while on earth. All the past kings are, like the Osun goddess, considered to be Orisa (deities) whose names should not ordinarily be mentioned without appeasement. The libations to the gods and goddesses ward off evil that could harm the Alaro and his audience in the *oriki* session. Before leaving home on a typical day when the long epic poems are to be rendered, the Alaro has to take various kinds of traditional medicines (*ajesara*) and perform some private rituals (*ayajo*) to keep himself clean and safe. At the end of his performance, the Ataoja has to give him a bottle of wine and a live chicken. On getting home, he kills the chicken and licks some of its blood as an *erq* (neutralizer of evil effects). For the performance, the Ataoja has to reward the Alaro for his colorful use of language and knowledge of history.

The performance of the Alaro Ataoja on the Osun day is not just concluded after the palace rituals. Immediately afterwards the Ataoja, his important chiefs and their subjects proceed to the Osun shrine beside the Osun river to perform all other necessary rituals. As the Ataoja and his subjects trek to the Osun grove, the Alaro Ataoja leads the way singing the praises of the Osun goddess as well as the Ataojas. The incumbent Ataoja is reminded of the majestic steps his predecessors took many decades ago to the Osun grove, the extent to which such royal steps have brought honor to Osogbo, how the Osun goddess provided permanent protection for the Osogbo city to the extent that no invader ever succeeded in

beating the Osogbo people in war, and so on. After the rituals beside the Osun river, the Ataoja returns to the palace with the Alaro once more, leading the way by singing his praise-songs. It is after these ritualistic formalities that the business of the day is considered concluded.

The folk healer

Because of the hazards of his profession, the Alaro is also a traditional healer. He prepares various medicines for himself, his children and neighbors who have recognized his place in the traditional healing system. The point has been made earlier that he prepares medicines to protect himself when performing. He also prepares what is popularly known among the Yoruba people as *ogun asoye* (i.e., the medicine that keeps one alert mentally). As the traditional archivist of historical data on Osogbo, the Alaro has to ensure that he is mentally alert at all times. He also prepares the *ogun asoye* for school children who seek to be mentally alert in their school work. Should the Alaro forget some facts, he would quickly render some magical chants (*ofò*) and immediately regain all his forgotten data.

Performing to royalty makes the Alaro Ataoja's profession a lucrative one. The Ataoja pays his performer a fixed monthly honorarium from his personal purse although the traditional ruler receives his own pay from the Local Government Council. Popoola Ajani is the first Alaro Ataoja to enjoy such a privilege in Osogbo. The head drummer in the palace is also paid a fixed honorarium. In the past, the Alaro received no fixed pay. He depended only on the gifts offered to him occasionally by the Ataoja and his many guests. In addition to the marginal gifts received by Popoola Ajani from the Ataoja and other visitors to the palace, he did occasionally practice privately. However, he treats the palace with great respect by not singing any of its *oriki* (praise-songs) at any public place. When invited to a ceremony, the Alaro merely sings the praises of his patrons, dwelling on their personal historical qualities or those of their towns of origin.

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Integrating Oral and Written

The Poetic "I" as an Allegory of Life

LAURI HARVILAHTI

The demands imposed on folklore collections arise from diverse methodological frameworks, and the research practice is very often a result of the observance of axioms based on the scientific practices or paradigms dominant or in fashion. In Finland the bias in the mid nineteenth century was (in the first phase) towards attempts to find additional material for the Kalevala. Later, when it became clear that the Kalevala was not a primary target for folklore collections, prehistory and geographic distribution came into focus. We do not, therefore, have any abundant material on the contextual use, internalization processes, or social meanings. Only in relatively few cases are there variants of songs recorded from the same singer, the biographic information is as a rule scanty, and the observation of natural performance situations was not one of the tasks assigned to collectors by the Finnish Literature Society.¹

During the period of the historic-geographic school in Finland, it was required that, in order to fulfill the demands of proper research, the body of text variants should be "complete", taking into account the time and place of the collection of each text and the available information on the tradition carrier's background. This was justified

¹ We may also list some source-critical problems:

i) The collectors did not always understand (or interpret) the singers' text correctly (although the singers did not know the meaning of every word, either).

ii) There were differences in the transcription norms of the dialects in question – if there were any norms at all. Often the dialectal forms were transcribed by the collectors or editors into literary ones.

iii) The field-notes were sometimes unclear. It was not regarded necessary to write down everything. Repeated verses, sequences, even longer chapters were often written by giving only the first letter or syllable of each word or only the first word of the verse + a stroke. Comments like "cont. as usual", "etc." or "as in other variants" were common. If shorthand was used, the notes were deciphered by putting the missing parts into square brackets. It is necessary to note that the collectors generally used abbreviations and the like only in cases in which the omitted parts of the text would not have provided the collector with any additional information. This all means that an exact analysis of the metric system, or morphological and phonological variation is not always reliable. The basic content of the verses and the basic lexical elements and syntactic structures have been preserved reliably enough to justify analysis.

on the basis of the assumption that the geographical or typological distribution of the preserved texts would reveal the prehistory of the texts, and that some texts might work as a *codex unicus* having a key importance. Thus, the adherents of the historic-geographic school strove at the beginning of the twentieth century to reconstruct meta-texts or invariants. Later the functionalistic paradigm rejected the value of texts dating from the nineteenth century or earlier, regarding them as dead artifacts, since it was argued that those texts were not collected in a natural social context, i.e., the proper context of functioning of folklore in a society, but in artificial situations. Folklore texts were regarded as folklore only if actually performed and the questions where, when, and from whom the text originated were no longer regarded as sufficient. According to Abrahams, collection takes away the particularities of the objects collected, stripping them of both history and cultural context (Abrahams 1993: 18). He cites Susan Stewart to prove his point: "The collection does not displace attention to the past, rather the past is in service of the collection, for whereas the souvenir lends authenticity to the past, the past lends authenticity to the collection" (Stewart 1984: 131).

During the past few decades the integration of various disciplines has yielded promising results in the study of Finnish Kalevalaic poems or Latvian folksongs. I should like to mention here the expertise of discourse analysis, ethnopoeitics, oral-formulaic theory, structuralism, computer analysis, the notions of folkloristic variation, intertextuality, and communicative competence. (See e.g., Siikala 1994, Anttonen 1994, DuBois 1994, and Vikis-Freibergs 1989.) This all represents a departure from the old, diachronic typologically oriented frameworks towards new perspectives.

The ethnopoeitic approach to Kalevalaic poetry

The ethnopoeitic approach focuses on revealing narrative patterns reaching from the level of stylistic features and other formal elements of the surface structure up to the overall meaning structures (cf. Hymes 1972) or on the transcription systems of recorded performances in order to visualize such "paralinguistic" meaningful features as pitch, quality of voice, loudness, pause, etc. (cf. Tedlock 1983, 1987, 1990).

Thomas DuBois writes (1994: 141): "Applying this type -- (i.e., Hymesian ethnopoeitic) analysis to Finnish folk poetry -- gives us means of understanding and appreciating each text as an entity: as an esthetically structured coherent whole. -- Each text -- deserves to be studied as a coherent piece." DuBois is right in the sense that it is not justified to maintain that this singer is "good" or that one pro-

duces merely "fabrications" solely on the basis of the values of the researcher or interpreter. In some cases, however, we should talk about "incompetence in performance" (cf. Anttonen 1994), as in the following example.

In West Ingria the collector V. Alava collected in the summer of 1891 as many as 19 epic texts from one singer called Naastoi. As he wrote in his diary: "She gave me very good songs." The following year Alava returned to Soikkola, but got only two texts, one of them a 16-verse version of "The Big Ox" ending up with a notion "did not remember", and one other song, which she sang assisted by her daughter-in-law. This case would have remained a mystery and we would have to be content with regarding all her texts as "coherent pieces", had we not had some contextual information. The unpublished diary of Alava for 1892 contains an entry:

She (Naastoi) was in a bad mood, apparently because of the feast dedicated to St Ilja, since she was so reluctant in releasing her songs. The only song she remembered properly was Ilja's song: "There are spirits, there's a lot of ale, many sorts of beer" – and off she went in order to attend the next feast.

Each text does not necessarily constitute a coherent whole, but that is not to say that the "incoherent" texts are not as interesting as the "coherent" ones.

The poetic "I" and "The Creation of the World"

One of the early collectors of Ingrian Kalevalaic poems, O. Groundstroem, wrote in his diary:

Generally the songs represent for them something sacred and they sing them respectfully and with a solemn voice. As I wrote down the song "The Swallow Bird, the Sun Bird" I had an opportunity to hear the explanation of the origin of the light according to the people here. One old woman called Olena considered that the sun and the moon were born from an egg of a swallow, but another woman, Okoi, believed that "the only-begotten son of God" had brought the light from a mountain, and she proved her statement by singing a song of similar content. (Niemi 1904: 403–04.)

In the Orthodox Ingrian² (Izhor) version of the mythic epic song

² Ingria was (and still is) an area inhabited by Finnic and Russian population along the southern and eastern shores of the Gulf of Finland near St. Petersburg. From 1617 to 1721 Ingria belonged to the Kingdom of Sweden. Under the Treaty of Uusikaupunki

"The Creation of the World" the "creator" is a swallow that flies and seeks a suitable place as her nest. Finally the bird finds a hummock that floats on the sea and lays its eggs on it. During a storm the crest of a wave rolls the nest into the sea and the eggs get smashed. The swallow asks the smith to forge a tool (a rake) with which to gather the pieces. From the pieces of the egg the land, the sun, moon, and often also other heavenly bodies are formed.

In some cases, in the latter part of the text, the "I" assumes the role of the swallow and goes to the smith instead of the bird, rakes the egg-white, yolk, and shell together; and subsequently gives birth to the world. Consider the following example:

<i>Pääsköilintu, päivälintu,</i>	<i>A swallow-bird, a sun bird,</i>
<i>yölintu, lepakkolintu,</i>	<i>a night bird, a bat bird,</i>
<i>se ihhaala ilmanlintu,</i>	<i>a wonderful air-bird,</i>
<i>lenteli kessoisen päivän,</i>	<i>fluttered one summer day,</i>
<i>sykysyisen yön pimmiän,</i>	<i>one dark summer night,</i>
<i>etsi maata maatakssee,</i>	<i>searched for land to lie on,</i>
<i>mätästä muniaksee,</i>	<i>a hummock to lay eggs,</i>
<i>peltoa pesätäksee.</i>	<i>a field to nest.</i>
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<i>Pesoi vierähti vettee,</i>	<i>The nest turned into the sea,</i>
<i>munat pyörähdi perästä.</i>	<i>the eggs rolled after it.</i>
<i>Miä juoksin seppoilaa:</i>	<i>I ran to the smithy:</i>
<i>"Seppyveen, selvyeen,</i>	<i>"Oh my smith, my skilled man,</i>
<i>takojaan, tammueen</i>	<i>Oh my mighty hammerer,</i>
<i>taoit enne, t[aoit] egle,</i>	<i>you forged once, you forged</i>
	<i>yesterday,</i>
<i>taoi i tänäki päänä,</i>	<i>forge, too, today,</i>
<i>taoi rautain harraava,</i>	<i>forge a rake of iron,</i>
<i>haravoin meren kokkoo</i>	<i>I will rake up all the sea,</i>
<i>meren laineet lakkoo!"</i>	<i>lay flat the waves of the sea!"</i>

(SKVR. III:1, No. 1145. Singer: Kati from Väärnoja. Collector: V. Porkka. Verses 1-8, 15-24.)

The shift in the narrative from the third person singular to the first

(1721) it was annexed to Russia as part of the government of St. Petersburg. An important factor as regards the social conditions was serfdom, repealed by Alexander II in 1861 despite strong resistance from the noble land owners. Under the system of serfdom the people were serfs of either the private lords of the manor or of the Crown. (Alho 1979: 10-12, Honko 1962: 32-38.) The Kalevalaic poems collected in Ingria in the 19th century belong to the lyric-epic tradition typically preserved by female singers. Of the ca. 1,200 singers mentioned in the list of Ingrian singers by Salminen, there are only just over one hundred men. Men account for only some five hundred of the 15,000 songs noted down and recorded in Ingria, i.e., a good three percent (Salminen 1931: 528).

person is not the expression of a tendency towards a new development (nor incoherence) in the poem in question, but represents the dynamism and productivity of lyric epics in Ingria. The poetic "I" as a dominant feature of the lyric-epic tradition is an example of the adaptation process. Similar cases are to be found in other poems, belonging originally (like "The Creation of the World") to the mythical or aetiological poems, e.g., "The Origin of the Kantele" and "The Giant Oak" (cf. Harvilahti 1992: 70–73, cf. Honko 1981: 19–32, esp. 22–26).

In Ingria the lyrical and lyric-epic poems sung by women were linked to the sphere of everyday conditions, family rites, and the immediate environment. The poems describe birth, growing up, courting, marriage, the life of a daughter-in-law, usually emphasized with allegories and metaphors. Other epic songs of the area include tragic ballads, aetiological poems and courting songs founded on myths, with diverse wooing contests, and also epics on the theme of war (cf. Siikala 1990: 16–17). Lyric-epic poems also have thematic connections with wedding songs and laments (cf. Nenola-Kallio 1982: 86–95).

An especially popular subject is the status of the maiden, her marrying age, her share of the inheritance, courting and prospects of life as a married woman. These poems are often about the position of the girl after marriage, e.g., "The Bartered Bride" or "Visiting the Childhood Home". In "The Lost Goose" the main character "I" searches for her brother's goose and finds it boiling in a pot on a strange farm, and the poem "To School from Home" describes life in the husband's home. In "The Daughter Drowner" the mother drowns her daughters for the reason that her son's prospective brides refused his proposals because he had too many sisters at home. In "The Maiden Drawn up to the Clouds," a mother seeks her daughter, who has lost her way while in search of water. The allegories and metaphors of doom, search and longing mirrored in these poems form the core of the lyrical epic of Ingria. The main theme is the fear of being deprived of one's self on being given in marriage: loss of youth, childhood home, brothers and sisters – or (when the mother occupies the main role) one's own children (see Harvilahti 1994: 97–98).

Matti Kuusi mentions in the study on the Ingrian rune singer Maria Luukka that the most common character in her poems is *mie*, "I", dominant in the lyrics, dance songs and in the lyrical and surprisingly, as he notes, "in the epic proper, too". It is also common for a song to begin with a monologue introduction and later assume the third person. (Kuusi 1983: 177–78, Siikala 1990: 16–17). The narration in the "I" form indicates that the singers identified their own lives with the content of the poems, although the poetic "I" does not necessarily represent the singer herself, since in oral performance "everybody is saying everything to everyone through the mouth of the poet or the

narrative performer" (Muižniece 1989: 143, ref. to Ong 1977).

From the narratological point of view the poetic "I" functions as a kind of "enunciative marker" and it is comparable with other deictics such as "you", "she/he", "it", "now", "this", "then", etc. (cf. Hanks 1989: 107, Récanati 1979, van den Heuvel 1985). It is interesting to note that certain scenes and formulas centered around the poetic "I" link together poems that do not belong together contentually and may thus form extensive networks. The "I" form found in the aetiological poems (e.g., "The Great Oak", "The Origin of the Kantele" and "The Origin of the World") is an example of the dominant role of such deictics. The "I" or "the maiden" has in these mythic poems an active role as a result of an adaptation prompted by the lyric-epic poetic network (cf. Honko 1981, Harvilahti 1994: 98).

Mode of performance and the role of the lead singer

In Ingria, while performing the Kalevalaic songs in a chorus or group, one singer in turn took the lead and the others accompanied her. The lead singer performed one verse, sometimes two or three, and the chorus continued immediately after the verse had been sung or joined in the last word or syllable of the phrase. The chorus repeated the verse, performed a parallel verse or continued the song and sometimes added a refrain that consisted of meaningless words and (sometimes) repeated portions of the previous phrases. (Simonsuuri 1972: 43–45, Enäjärvi-Haavio 1949: 145–49, 181.) The lead singer caught the last syllables of the verse performed by the chorus and added a new verse. Ingrian group singing was characterized by movement and collective singing, and it can in many respects thus be compared to the women's singing tradition of Estonia, Latvia, or Russia. The similar mode of singing in this region is not necessarily of common origin, since there are – in spite of the obvious similarities – big differences in texts, melodies and performing styles. I also recorded in 1989 epic songs performed in a very similar mode by a group of Tulu speaking women in Karnataka, India.

In nineteenth century Ingria the songs, led by solo singers, were performed in a circle or chain by groups of women with subsequent dancing at the swings or out in the village streets (Simonsuuri 1972: 41–42, Niemi 1904: 290). The girls used to get together on Sundays and especially on holy days in spring and summer and wander singing through the streets, or they could gather somewhere outside the village. While performing the songs they either formed free groups and processions, or organized circles or chains. The songs were either serious poems sung in a "long" or a "soft" voice (i.e., moving slowly to a leisurely melody), such as some tragic lyric-epic ballads (e.g., "The

Killing of the Previous Wife", "The Daughter Drowner" or "The Brother Killed on the Boat"), or "quick" songs danced in pairs one behind the other. (See Enäjärvi-Haavio 1949: 156–61, Simonsuuri 1972: 47–48.) The experienced lead singers, being competent performers, had an important position as tradition bearers. They were responsible for the "right" flow of the performances, for producing the songs coherently, and for relating them to the performing situation, audience, etc. Other singers not only repeated and supplemented what the lead singer sang, but also controlled the progress of the song. (Cf. Hymes 1972: 47, Bauman 1977: 11, Briggs 1988: 8.)

Most of the Ingrian Kalevalaic poems have been collected as dictated, sometimes recited, but rarely with an accompanying singer or chorus. The natural context of performance was not considered to be of any primary, and very rarely of even secondary importance.³ According to Jukka Saarinen, the dictated mode did not cause any changes in the variation that were clearly observable in the material (Saarinen 1988: 10, Foley 1990: 40–41). However this may be, the lexical basis and the overall structure remain almost intact in the dictated mode, but the variation characteristic of the performing situation is not preserved, e.g., allusions and formulaic bridges combining scenes in the process of singing between the lead singer and the chorus.

Kalevalaic meter and Ingrian melodies

One of the cornerstones of the study on Kalevalaic metrics is the statement that the meter lived in the sung form. Unfortunately, the printed material does not give any idea about the sung form. Even if the melody was written down, it was not printed in the pages of the *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* (Ancient Poems of the Finnish People; from now on referred to as SKVR).⁴ As a matter of fact the melodies were written down only in rare cases during the process of collection. In the nineteenth century the phonograph was not yet in use and the biggest part of the material was collected (as mentioned above) as dictated on special occasions organized for or by the collector. In

³ There are some rather amusing descriptions reflecting the difficulties in coping with live performances. Two collectors (T. Tallqvist and A. Törneröos) in the mid nineteenth century tried in Ingria to approach a "natural context", a spontaneous situation of performing songs round a bonfire during a Midsummer feast. As soon as the collectors arrived, the maidens stopped singing and even the bonfire died down. The disappointed collectors went to observe the feasts of the Russians living in a nearby village. Nobody there paid any special attention to the Finnish collectors, but continued their celebration (Niemi 1904: 386).

⁴ The published collections of Finnish folk poetry in 33 volumes (1908–48), containing approximately 1.3 million verses.

Ingria only some of the earliest collectors noted down any melodies: D. E. D. Europaeus (six melodies in 1847 and 1853), H. A. Reinholm (one melody in 1847), and A. Borenius (as many as 94 melodies in 1877). The field-notes of A. Borenius are most accurate and he even observed the alteration between the lead singer and the chorus. As a rule, Borenius asked the singers to give two performances: one sung and the other dictated. (Cf. Saarinen 1994: 180.) Some material was recorded at the beginning of this century using a phonograph. A large number of rune melodies were collected in Ingria by E. Levón (193 melodies in 1903) and A. Launis (460 melodies of Kalevalaic poems and laments in 1903 and 1906).

The fourth volume of the *Suomen kansan sävelmät* (Melodies of the Finnish People), edited by Armas Launis, gives a total of 1772 Ingrian and Karelian rune melodies. On the basis of this collection it is possible to become convinced of the multiformity offered by the melodies, the variability of the roles of the singer and the chorus, the length of the verses, the relations between melodies and texts. The text published in the SKVR is not in line with the sung form. If the Kalevalaic metre really lived in the sung poetry (Ravila 1935; Leino 1994: 56, 61–62), how much would our concept of the meter change if we were to consider e.g., repetitions of words within the same verse, refrains consisting of meaningless words or syllables, omission of the last syllable or the melismatic lengthening of phrases? The musical variation in Ingrian material is of great relevance, and not only from the ethnomusicological perspective.

"To School from Home"

In the SKVR the song "To School from Home", collected by Borenius from West Ingria in 1877 has been published in the SKVR (III:1, No. 585) without a melody, not to mention such details as the alternation between the lead singer and the chorus, repeated words, etc. Thus, if we were to use only the printed version of the SKVR, we would have at our disposal verses in a more or less perfect Kalevalaic, trochaic tetrameter. In the printed version everything is "in its place": long stressed syllables occur only in rising, short stressed syllables only in falling positions (see Leino 1994: 60–61). In the following are the two opening verses with a word-for-word translation of the text as it is published in the SKVR:

Läksin kóuluhú koísta, óppihé omíлта máilta.

'I went to school from home, to learn from my own lands'

In the musical notation by Borenius (see Launis 1910: 101) the verses

falling contour of the melody, the ambitus, even the length of the phrase are strikingly similar. The following are two excerpts of laments collected by Armas Launis in Soikkola, Ingria at the beginning of the twentieth century (Launis 1910: 1):

Example 2.

Soikkola, Oussimäki. Launis (687).

Kal - li - het - kaa mi - un kas - vo - par - vu - - e - ni.

Soikkola, Viistinä. Launis (ph. 49 a.).

Oi, Is - ma - rik - ko,

This type of melody seems to be common in a large number of lyric-epic and lyric songs, wedding songs, and laments.⁶ The melodies of the lyric songs "My Protector Lies under the Turf" or "Who Has Created Me, the Miserable" belong to the same type with slight variations in the melodic structure. Intertextual relations between songs belonging to different genres are reinforced by the melody. The melody of the wedding song "Make the Cross on Your Breast" is (except for minor difference in the melody and time) almost identical with the above example. In this case the chorus repeats the text of the first verse identically (Launis 1910: 101).

Example 3.

Soikkola, Savimäki. Lähteenkorva (195).

E: Teek - kä ris - ti rin - nal - le, rin - nal - le - - si,

K: Teek - kä ris - ti rin - nal - le, rin - nal - le - si.

⁶ Honko (1993: 454–55) underlines common features of the wedding ceremonies in the North-East European tradition area: "One of these features is the richness and the quantitative balance between wedding songs and wedding laments. The interplay of these genres gives the ceremony its characteristic profile." The songs may, however, as Honko states, "dominate different parts of the wedding process."

This version with a refrain refers to the use of the song while dancing in circles or chains, yet not necessarily or solely at a wedding. The same song, tale, etc., can be used in different contexts and in diverse functions (cf. Honko 1981). In analyzing folklore we are in fact analyzing the means of expression of different channels available to oral tradition for expressing, interpreting, or explaining life, experiences and the environment. As a further example, one of the common melodies for performing the Ingrian version of "The Creation of the World" originates from a popular Russian romance of the 1830–40s by S. N. Stromilov and A. Varlamov called *To ne veter vetku klonit* 'It is not the wind that bends the branch' (cf. Koski 1974: 482). The flexibility and tendency for functional adaptation (see Honko 1981) of living folklore leads in reality to the result that the contacting surface between genres is flexible, permeable, and transparent (cf. Tarkka 1993: 171). Texts divided into genres, constructed by researchers and placed outside the realm of living folklore may appear to be analytical fossils.

The poems are no longer "epitomized like ruins in the landscape" (Abrahams 1993: 11, 15). The few simple examples presented above give only a glimpse of the research possibilities offered by the nineteenth century folklore collections. The poetic "I" has got eyes and ears. These collections form a view into the past, a window that can be reopened using, new interpretations and methods.

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missionary Peter Kragh (1793–1883) asked his parishioners to write down old stories for him. Because the Danes working in Greenland had to know Greenlandic at this time, the Greenlanders could write for Kragh knowing that they would be understood. The personal commentaries in the manuscripts indicate that Kragh had an intimate, personal relationship with his parishioners. What may come as a surprise is that the Greenlanders were able to write at all. In Western Europe we tend to see other people – especially “primitive” peoples such as the Eskimo hunting culture – as having been immensely “backward” at that time. In fact, Greenland literacy already compared favorably with rural populations in Europe at this point. Peter Kragh received more than 90 stories, 85 of which were later included in Rink’s collection (see below).

The first large-scale, systematic collection was carried out by the Danish head of the administration (“inspector”) Hinrich Rink (1819–93). Rink was very critical of Danish rule in Greenland, considering it to be the cause of the Greenlanders’ material and spiritual decline. Rink accused the Danish administration of having deprived the Greenlanders of their traditional social institutions and authorities without replacing them with adequate new ones. Yet Rink realized that there was no turning back; the Greenlanders had to develop under modern (i.e. European) conditions. Rink started the local councils known as *forstanderskaber* (directions) as a way of training the Greenlanders politically, enabling them to participate in the ruling of their own country. Likewise, he founded the first Greenlandic newspaper, *Atuagagdliutit*, in 1861. The newspaper had a Greenlandic editor, and all were invited to contribute any item they wanted to share with their fellow countrymen.

Nationhood and the quest for narratives

With his own background in the Danish national Romantic movement, Rink fully understood the importance of sharing a common past in the creation of a “people” and a national state – concepts totally unknown in Eskimo hunting culture. The collection of oral tradition was intended to provide the Greenlanders with this important knowledge about their own background, and to restore their lost self-confidence. At the same time the existence of such a tradition would prove to the Europeans (the Danes) that the Greenlanders were not to be considered as mere “primitives”, but as a nation in their own right.

On April 22, 1858, Rink printed his “invitation” to the Greenlanders to submit old legends and songs, along with illustrations,

The early principles of editing

The storytellers from the Rink period seemed quite aware of the role they were playing in preserving the past. One of the especially gifted men was the above mentioned Aron from Kangeq, who is world-famous for his woodcuts and watercolors, and equally creative and inventive in the literary field. In the Kragh period the storytellers proved to be part of a still intact and living tradition by incorporating new elements in the old stories without hesitation. Hence, one can, for example, meet a crocodile living under an iceberg. In the old days the Arctic world was inhabited by so many strange creatures anyway, like *kiliffat* 'huge animals with six legs', enormous snakes, oversized bears, oversized wolves, etc. The incorporation of foreign elements is just one proof that the tradition was at this point still alive and active. In the Rink period, the storytellers understood that they had to keep the tradition "pure" from foreign influence; hence, no crocodiles. Likewise, European stories occur among the stories in the Kragh collection, but not in the Rink collections. The originals contain "anachronisms" such as a cooking-pot "rattling" as it tumbles (pots were made of soapstone before the arrival of the Europeans), or references to European goods like tobacco and cloth, but these references were usually removed by the editor in the printed versions, so that in fact the stories present themselves as purer and more "original" than they actually were.

The storytellers' personal comments, in which they dissociate themselves from the heathen contents of the story told, were also removed in the printed versions. In this way the Christian background of the storytellers is heavily underexposed, and the more subtle influence (unlike the obvious crocodile) escapes the reader's notice. In this way Aron's creativity especially manifests itself as a new way of composing, so that some of his most famous stories turn into descriptions of an individuation process in which an individual, through a long and hard struggle, arrives at an understanding and reconciliation with life, and with himself. This moral obviously has Christian roots rather than a collective, non-individualistic, shamanic Eskimo background. However, in adopting a new perception of humanity, these stories have become the most loved and the most frequently told, also in the modern literary tradition.

The Rasmussen collection

The most famous collection of Greenlandic oral tradition was carried out by Knud Rasmussen (1879-1933) in the first decades of this

Myter og Sagn fra Grønland (Myths and Legends from Greenland) (1921–25), Rasmussen writes that the stories were never meant to be written down and were intended solely for oral presentation, this is very misleading with regard to much of the West Greenlandic material.

The stories of Jaakuaraq Eugenius (1863–1934) represent a – very successful – endeavour by a third generation to find a form in which the old stories could be transformed into texts. Jaakuaraq knew of Aron's stories, at least those that had been printed in *Kaladlit oqalluktualliait*, and he followed Aron's method but also added to it. He elaborated and elucidated the essential components such as 1) composition, 2) interest in the inner, psychological inducements behind the external actions, and 3) "realistic" rather than magical explanations – such features made it possible to distinguish Aron's style from that of the other storytellers'. Furthermore, Jaakuaraq's contributions mainly consist in tightening up the style, cutting out the many repetitions that can be seen as relics of the oral tradition in Aron's texts, and improving the technique of description, an aspect not so important for the oral story but very important when it is written down and decoded by reading. Jaakuaraq Eugenius was a very gifted writer and storyteller, and many of Rasmussen's most famous stories were written by him. His stories were printed in the Greenlandic newspapers during the 1930s, and together with Kristoffer Lynge's *Kalâdlit oqalugtuait oqalualâvilo* (1938–39), a selection of the most popular stories from the Rink and Rasmussen collections, these stories became the most important source of oral tradition for subsequent generations.

The main phases of textualization

Greenlandic oral tradition may thus be studied in the following "phases". Due to the special geographical conditions, the chronology of the collections does not follow the chronology of the phases:

1) The Kragh collection, parts of the Rink collections (i.e. storytellers from the West Greenlandic periphery) and the Thule and East Greenland collections.

2) The Rink collections from Central West Greenland, especially the Nuuk area (with Kangeq situated in the archipelago right outside Nuuk).

3) The storytellers from the same geographic area as (2), but a couple of generations later in the Rasmussen period. Here one still finds oral storytellers (who never tried to write down their stories themselves), who make use of a style more concordant with phase 1.

deavor of the "writing storytellers" to transform the oral stories into written texts would have to be considered as a kind of "transition". An example of the work of these writers would be the improvement in their techniques of *description*. When writing down a story, many features which in the oral performance would be expressed by gestures or voice would have to be described in *words*. This means that it is often very difficult to read the earliest versions of a story, since these extra-textual features have not been added by the author. In fact one gets only "half the story", while in the later versions one misses much less, because the writer has clearly understood the needs of the written medium.

The texts produced by the "writing storytellers" are not "transitional" in the sense that the writing storytellers themselves actually developed into authors of modern fiction. Modern Greenlandic fiction was created by an educated elite *without* direct links to the hunting culture that had carried the oral tradition. Moreover, the initiative to make a collection always came from the outside, from a representative of the literate culture. However, the texts are "transitional" in the sense that they paved the way for subsequent, literary authors. After the publication of the four little books of *kaladlit oqalluktualliait*, it became quite normal for Greenlanders to write, and to expect their writings to be printed and to be read by others. After each story information about the author, his name, profession and settlement was printed, and in this way Greenlanders very early got used to "going public" and to making use of established institutions. It seems reasonable to assume that this played a decisive role in the development of an independent Greenlandic literary tradition – a process already begun in the last century, if the hymn tradition is included.

The first actual piece of so-called fiction, a novel, was published in 1914, whereas most other so-called aboriginal peoples did not develop their own literature until sometime during the 1970s and 80s. Writing down their oral tradition led the Greenlanders to experiment with the written medium in order to transform the stories into texts. The development of the genre into more "modern" forms saved the tradition as a living tradition, also relevant in a changing society.

Likewise, the newspaper mentioned above meant a similar option for the development of "transitional texts". Anyone could submit whatever one wanted to share with fellow countrymen to the newspaper *Atuagagdliutit*. Whenever people met, traveling along the coast – as was the habit of the migrating Inuits before the advent of Danish colonial power – they would not only tell one another the old stories handed down by their ancestors, but also all the news since their last meeting. The newspaper was perfect for

"novel" by Gert Lyberth (1867–1929). The novel was begun in 1915 but not completed until sometime during the 1920s, and not published until 1981, when a photographic reproduction was printed of the handwritten manuscript, illustrated with the writer's own drawings (Petersen 1981). Gert Lyberth did not attend the teachers' college in Nuuk. However, he was not a sealhunter either. As a youngster he was employed as a trainee in the Royal Greenlandic Trading Company, and he later worked as manager of the trading station at various small settlements. Gert Lyberth could be classified as a "writing storyteller", since in 1924 he wrote for Knud Rasmussen a manuscript containing a number of stories from the oral tradition. Before this, however, he had begun writing his novel, which he himself clearly understood as a *cómbination* of the oral and the literary tradition, where the *new* story about two friends who try to adapt to the new times is told alternating with comic incidents reflecting the *old* traditions. It is no coincidence that all the illustrations depict oral tradition in terms of comic incidents.

Obviously, the writer had great difficulty putting life into the "new" part of the story, with all the discussions between the two friends about how to behave in the changing society, with the purpose of bringing about a change for the better. This part of the story seems heavily dependent on the first "real" Greenlandic novel: *Signagtugaq* (The Dream) from 1914, written by Mathias Storch (1883–1957). Still, it would be tempting to extend the term "transitional" to a text such as this, so clearly moving from one genre, one medium to another.

It is astonishing how persistent this "transitional" period has been in Greenlandic literature. Even though a consistent analysis, comparing Gert Lyberth's text to the aforementioned "real" novel, written by a writer who clearly belonged to the "writers' group", might show the latter to be much more "sophisticated" in its technique of plot construction, character development, etc., the difference would only be one of degree. If Gert Lyberth's text is called "transitional", the same designation could just as easily be applied to most Greenlandic literature, even the most recent.

Although the modern writers of Greenland did not directly participate in the hunting culture, they were not quite separated from it either. The settlements were small; even the "capital" Nuuk had only a few hundred inhabitants at the beginning of this century. Most of the boys sent to the teachers' college in Nuuk had fathers or close relatives who were sealhunters. Well into this century the curriculum at the teachers' college still included hunting skills. And the writers grew up with the oral tradition. One of the main figures of Greenlandic literature, Hans Lynge, tells in his autobiography how the famous storyteller Esaias was a welcome

The Danes maintain the power to describe the Greenlanders in terms of being stuck in this period of adolescence, of transition. In a changing society, where the cultures we used to describe within the terms of anthropology or folklore are not more "oral" but trying to claim their right to be part of the modern world without losing their own identity, we might want to avoid a term so loaded with connotations as the term "transitional". Instead we should talk about the *transformation* of oral stories into written texts and about the modern texts as a *meeting* between oral and literary traits. Apart from offering a more precise description, these terms allow us to appreciate that the outcome of writing could be different from the way we know it in the dominant European culture.

Greenlandic literature could certainly be the evidence for Brian Street's claim for "literacies" rather than any single "literacy" (Street 1984). The Greenlandic material is yet another example that there is nothing absolute about the shift to literacy, which is taken for granted in the "autonomous" model advanced by Jack Goody (1968, 1977). Just as the oral tradition proves on closer inspection to be influenced by writing to a much larger degree than could have been expected, oral conventions continue to affect literate forms in modern Greenlandic literature. The process of writing down the oral tradition is an integral part of the history of Greenlandic literature, just as the development of modern Greenlandic literature should be interpreted along horizontal lines of intermixture between cultures and media.

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Gesar in Contemporary Tibetan Society

JIACUO JIANGBIAN

Commenting on the two great Indian epics of Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore once made the following remarks:

Some centuries have passed but the sources of Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata have not been exhausted in India. They are read everyday by every family in every village and they are respected for their common thoughts and feelings both in shops on the market place as well as at the entrance of the king's palace. The two great poets should be eulogized. Although their names have disappeared in the journey of time, their voice still endows millions of Indian families with strength and peace like a continuous torrent of cool water which brings age-old fertile soil to the land and soul of India and makes it rich.

Tagore emphatically pointed out:

It is the Rāmāyaṇa that sums up the universal ideal as noble as the Himalayas and the thoughts as deep as the sea. Because of these most fundamental characteristics, Rāmāyaṇa breaks through limitations of time and space and wins respect of poets of the world.

This evaluation is also applicable to Gesar. It combines universal ideals as noble as the Himalayas and thoughts as deep as the sea. It breaks through time limits like a continuous torrent of cool freshening water and is recited from remote ancient times to the present day. It is as imposing as the Himalayas and as old as the Ganges and the Yellow River. It is a monument in the Tibetan cultural history. It still exerts a far-reaching influence on the Tibetan society.

most important way for the spread of Gesar has been through singing from one generation to another by ballad singers. Our investigations show that there are about 100 ballad singers of different types in the above mentioned Gesar belt in China. This includes about 20 ballad singers who can sing and recite over ten episodes of Gesar. In the past, ballad singers performed in front of their audiences in rural and pastoral areas. Today this has changed. Ballad singers have moved onto the stage, plazas, and to the studios and they have now access to a larger audience through the modern media of broadcasting and television.

Chinese Tibetans are distributed in Tibet Autonomous Region, ten Tibetan autonomous prefectures and two autonomous countries, covering a land area of more than 2.4 million square kilometers which is more than a quarter of the total territory of China. All these autonomous areas have their own television broadcasting stations. The singing of Gesar has been broadcasted and put on the air for more than one decade now – since the early 1980s – and it has been well liked by the audience. Tape recordings by good epic singers have become popular.

Television and broadcasting have a wide coverage. Gesar reaches widespread populations through modern mass communication. However, there are limitations; the biggest one is that of time. The epic cannot be sung for several (over ten) hours or even for days as it used to be done in the agricultural and pastoral areas. Moreover, the ballad singer today has no direct interaction with the audience. Both content and form of the Gesar epic will change if this situation continues. This new development calls for the attention of epic scholars.

There were no modern printing technologies in the Tibetan areas in the past and therefore Gesar was handed down, besides by the word of mouth, mainly through hand-written and woodcut manuscript copies. Such copies were particularly precious. In some areas, it is said, one yak was exchanged for such a copy. In some families, a hand-written copy was consecrated in the shrine as a family treasure. Nowadays, radical changes have taken place. In the recent decade, some 66 episodes of the epic have been published with a total number of 3 million copies. This means that every two Tibetans share one copy. Gesar is thus widely known.

Of course, the impact and role of the Gesar epic in the cultural life of Tibetans is changing with social changes and the development of science, technology and literary art. In the modern Tibetan society, culture is becoming pluralistic and peoples' temperaments and interests are also changing. The influence of Gesar in some respects is diminishing because the young generation is not patient and interested in listening to the recounting of the long epic for ten successive days.

Reasons for Gesar's persistence

The most important reason why Gesar survived from the ancient times to the present day and is still popular is that it is needed and loved by the people. This need and love is manifested in several aspects of the epic's cultural persistence.

Psychological needs. The positive and healthy content of life reflected in this epic provides cultural models of yearning and pursuing a good and happy life to the Tibetan people who once suffered a lot. They discovered certain spiritual and psychological comfort in Gesar and other national heroes and their stories. In times of crisis, people of all lands find some comfort and direction in the action of epic heroes and in the roles and models they present. The Tibetan people are no exception.

Behavioural needs. The singing and reciting of Gesar is indispensable on important feast days, on happy occasions and sacrificial rites, and in religious worship. In the past, Gesar was often recited during fights between two tribes in order to pray for the protection by the war-god and for his help in defeating the enemy. Merchants always recited Gesar when setting off for business to far away lands.

Educational needs. There were almost no schools, let alone that in a modern sense, in the Tibetan society. Religious education and knowledge only was imparted orally in temples. As a result, the majority of the Tibetan people could not read or write. Under such circumstances, Tibetan farmers and herdsmen could only learn about their national history and knowledge from oral traditions. The Gesar epic was their best source of history, the best textbook on life and knowledge in general. They gained a lot of enlightenment and encouragement from the historical stories. With the handing down from one generation to another of the epic, the national history and cultural knowledge of various kinds also was handed down in an oral and natural form.

Social needs. Gesar displays the extolment of the beautiful, the good, honest and the noble and exposure and criticism of the ugly, the evil and the despicable in the Tibetan society. The beliefs and ethical values advocated by Gesar have become the social norm. This is of great significance for strengthening unity within the ethnic group and promoting social stability and development. Take language for instance. An epic is the art of language. Gesar is full of folk proverbs which are rich in content and succinct in style. These proverbs have permeated into the Tibetan society and into the language of daily use of the people. These have become the norm for action and criteria for telling the good from the evil and moral principles. This kind of oral tradition plays an important role

Minstrels: A Golden Key to Epic Study

JIA ZHI

China is a country which is known for its epics. The recording and publication of the epics of numerous minority nationalities is one of the most remarkable achievements Chinese folklore studies have made in recent years. Epics are a living phenomenon in China. Epic performers are still alive, narrating and singing epics – a fact which provides very favourable conditions for studying oral epics.

Epics of various Chinese nationalities, fall into two main categories on the basis of their contents: one is *genesis epics*, or epics raised on myths which are found in almost every minority nationality, especially those scattered in south China. These epics are sometimes also regarded as “root genealogy”, and mostly sung in rituals and on the occasions of ritual sacrifices. These epics narrate the history of the nationalities and the genesis of mankind as well as all other things on earth.

The other category is *heroic epics*. These epics seem to have emerged during the period of the disintegration of primitive societies and the formation of the slave societies. Such epics reflect the oral history of the tribes, campaigns and allies of the tribes, etc. For example, the three great epics, found in the northern grassland, the Tibetan and Mongolian Gasar, Mongolian Jiangol and Kirgiz (Khal-khas) Manas, are full of such elements and are still performed by professional folk artists. I have discussed in detail these aspects of the epics in my paper which I delivered in Turku in 1985 (See “Epics in China”, paper presented at the International Symposium on the Kalevala and the World's Epics, Turku, Finland, 1985, published by Lauri Honko in *Religion, Myth, and Folklore in the World's Epics*, Berlin & New York, 1990, pp. 503–18).

Epics, generally speaking, whether of the genesis type or the heroic type, in their respective periods, narrate to their own nationalities and their descendants the national history, the genesis of mankind as well as all other things found on the earth. Furthermore, these epics also narrate the migration of the nations and the creation of cultures. Epics narrate the great deeds of the national heroes the communities worship; and in this manner they serve as reminders of

The Dege Buddhist Scripture Academy, Changdu, Sichuan Province, is famous for block-printed editions of the epics. A Tibetan family named QiTeGa is considered particularly important for copying. For generations, this family has taken up the profession of collecting and collating different records and hand-written copies of the epics, and also of making hand copies of epics in more perfect and elegant language to popularize and disseminate them. This is a rare historical phenomenon in which the oral literature has shaped up and become current in the written form. It proves that Tibetans have been circulating and disseminating hand-written copies and block-printed editions of epics for a long time and that these written forms have existed side by side in interaction with the oral forms. Similarly, the Mongolian epic *The Story of Gasir* is a Mongolian version of the Tibetan *Gasar*, which came to Inner Mongolia together with Lamaism, sung by minstrels according to the hand-written copies, and was then transformed into a new creation with full features of the Mongolian epics. When the Mongolian minstrel Canbula Aoribu sings *The Story of Gasir* Khan, which he learned from the late famous artist Taoketao accompanied by his horse-head-qin, it spreads a charming atmosphere of the thick grasslands.

Documenting minstrels in performance

There is a great difference between the study of epics by the text alone and what I learned from listening to and watching the performances of the minstrels and while talking to, interviewing and interacting with them. The living epic I saw performed is so rich that none of the texts is comparable. The existence of minstrels is to my mind thus a golden key to understanding and appreciating the phenomenon called a living epic performance.

Therefore, it is a very important step for the development of the treasure-house of the national epics to record the minstrels and to interview the folk artists, for this yields various versions of the epics from the oral form of literature as well as recording how an artist learns the art and the living performance of talking while singing. We can take *Gasar*, the longest epic in the world, as an example. According to the available statistics, there are 140–50 minstrels (if those who have died recently are included), who sing this long epic, and all these singers come from the three nationalities: Tibet, Mongolia and Tu. The records of their performances are several times larger than the hand-written copies and block-printed editions we gathered before. Audio-recordings amount to more than 4,000 cassettes, or 4,000 hours of actual performances. These include old Zaba's 25.5 volumes, 960 cassettes; Sanzu's 41 volumes, 198 cassettes; Yumei's

after their "doors of wisdom are opened" and when the "living Buddha" sets the altar to pass the magic power on to them.

King Gasar is a national hero, also the reincarnation of Buddha in the hearts of the Tibetan people, who believe everything is granted by him; even the hand-written copies and block-printed editions of the epic are treated as sacred objects. Gasar conquering demons, traitors in the Ridge Kingdom, the complications in love of the heroes and beauties, as well as other experiences of conducting oneself in society; all these attributes make the epic a living encyclopedia for the people of Tibet. The colour of Buddhism in the epic and in the lives of the minstrels also makes the epic both a pillar of Buddhism and a textbook of the Buddhist way of life.

A typology of minstrels

There is more than one way of classifying the folk artists. In general, I think there are two categories: one is "god granting", the other "self studying". In the first category there are "learning in dream" artists; old Zaba fell into a lethargic sleep for seven days and nights in his childhood and he became able to narrate the story of Gasar continuously; the woman artist Yumei dreamed a fantastic dream and fell seriously ill. When she recovered, she could talk and sing about Gasar. There are "digging out deposits" artists, who learned in their previous existence from Master Lotus Bom's preaching that in order to pass the epic Gasar onto later generations the Master has to keep it in the universe and spirit world; only by "digging out deposits" can artists realize it. The "round halo" artist is also a wizard able to communicate with the divine powers and tell fortunes. He can see in a small bronze mirror what others cannot and the divine text of the Gasar. As and when the "doors of wisdom are opened" by "living Buddhas", it is a story of granting divine powers and the skills of singing epics.

In the second category of "self studying", and "learn by hearing" artists, the minstrels can sing Gasar stories after they have heard or learned them by reading the text. Similarly, the "reciting and singing" artists are those who can read Tibetan, and they talk and sing the epic according to the text with a loud voice and pleasing tune so as to win the appreciation of the audience. Some artists learn the minstrel skills painstakingly by themselves during their roaming and begging. This is quite a popular way for them to earn a living.

The essence of the world view of the "god granting" artists is to publicize the Buddhist Samsara of life and death. Kind Gasar – the hero – is considered the reincarnation of Master Lotus Bom. Some artists able to narrate and sing Gasar are also considered the reincarna-

even more impressive and more like a textbook of life.

The epics, being the literary creation of the early stages of mankind, are popular because the plots and language are attractive. After she is kidnapped by Holgega, Zhumu turns herself into a needle, hiding in a remote corner. Holgega also changed himself into a thread, wriggling about the room to search for her, the needle. The thread chases the needle up and down and finally the thread goes through the eye of the needle, Zhumu is subdued and they marry. Such an odd and funny episode wins applause from the audience. (See the Initial Introduction of the *Tibetan Three Kingdoms* by Ren Naiqiang, Collections on Gasar, Vol. 11).

What can we learn from the various modes of performance and the interviews with these artists? What inspiration can we get from them? Studying epics through surviving texts alone, one can conduct textual research only on historical materials of all kinds. We can then collect and study the epics only in the context of historical materialism. This proves how important it is to watch the minstrels' performances and record the data and other materials and all that we witness during a performance. The living epics in China will sooner or later have no performances; only the texts will remain, which suggests the importance of interviewing and recording as much data as can be possible on minstrels, their performances and the various contexts in which these performances take place. This includes the local conditions and customs of the nationalities and the regions in which these are found. We must never neglect or lose the golden key of the Homer-like minstrels.

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